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The
VICTORIAN CYCLE

Books by
ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

THE VICTORIAN CYCLE
*(Those Earnest Victorians,
The Victorian Sunset, and
The Victorian Aftermath)*

THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PATRIOTISM

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MIND

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LIFE

THE CALL OF DAWN

NEW MINDS FOR OLD

The VICTORIAN CYCLE

By

ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD, D.Sc., M.A.

With an Introduction by

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

BOOK ONE: THOSE EARNEST VICTORIANS
BOOK TWO: THE VICTORIAN SUNSET
BOOK THREE: THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH



New York

Mcmxxxv

WILLIAM MORROW & COMPANY

THE VICTORIAN CYCLE

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1935

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INTRODUCTION

WITHOUT attempting to define the principles of good historical writing this much can be said with emphasis: two of the ideals which the best historians have followed are, first, that the subject of their history should be important for the times in which they write, and, second, that history should be so written as to have a significance beyond facts and dates. In the historical writing of the last half century these two ideals have been obscured by the scientific passion for exact statement, and often neglected altogether. There is no such thing as history in the absolute. A historian, like a poet or a novelist, is a creature of his own age, and the history which he writes for it is inevitably conditioned by what that age needs and wishes to know. Good historians realize this; chroniclers and accumulators of facts do not.

The excellent Victorian studies of Mr. Esmé Wingfield-Stratford owe much of their excellence to his skill and courage in writing the kind of history of the last age which was needed and which could be written in our own time. He has comprehended, as many of his contemporaries have not, the rules of the game for historical writing. It is from that state of mind and circumstance which we call Victorianism that the twentieth century has been born. The industrial revolution, beside whose powerful workings Napoleon's struggles for power now (as he says) seem almost irrelevant, began in England. In England the necessity that man should rapidly adapt himself to a new order of life or pay the penalty of igno-

rance, first became urgent. In England the philosophy of optimistic laissez-faire which built high with no foundations found its spokesman, its architects, and its skeptics. Victorianism is another name for the spirit of the nineteenth century, best studied in England, and in the sharp transition of the twentieth century, the Victorian Age, thus broadly interpreted, is the source and often the cause of all that we in the nineteen thirties have become.

And not only does Mr. Wingfield-Stratford's trilogy deal with the historical subject most important for an understanding of our own times, it treats of the significance of that subject as well as of its facts. The facts of political and military struggles have long been available, the facts of economic change have been more recently dug from the past with infinite labor. More recently still those social aspects of pleasure, taste, vice, virtue, philosophy, religion, and the emotional life generally, which scientific historians have too often neglected, begin to be lit with the light of interest and their significance appreciated. In his history of the rise and fall of Victorianism Mr. Wingfield-Stratford has made use of this accumulated knowledge, and has been particularly happy in adding to it new sources from reminiscence, from the tell-tale furnishing of Victorian homes still standing, from literature and especially from fiction, and from an extraordinary knowledge of what everyday life was like in nineteenth century England.

But he has shrewdly avoided the danger which has ruined many a good historian before him writing of the significance of things past. For him the Victorian Age is a moving drama, intensely real, deeply humorous, still

more deeply tragic; a drama whose plot is the failure of brilliant men in a great age to change mind and behavior as rapidly as they changed circumstance by extending their control over the resources of nature. But he is well aware that there can be as yet no Gibbon to write of Victorianism. Only the first act is played. The situation is clear, already we have passed one climax, but the denouement is in the future and belongs to prophecy, not to the historian.

Hence, and wisely, these three volumes, with their fascinating riches of manners, thoughts, emotions drawn from every Victorian source, are really a study of Victorianism rather than an attempt at final history. The author sees what it all seems to mean, but does not force his conclusions. Instead he makes his canvas as broad as possible, fills it with significant detail, makes it live and tell its own story. This is what happened to the eighteenth century when the machines began to throb. This is what the nineteenth century was like when the earnest Victorians set about the economic conquest of the world. Here is what it meant for us, their descendants, what it seems to mean for the future. But the end is not yet.

I must add that these volumes are of particular interest to Americans. The English experience in the nineteenth century was more closely parallel to ours than to that of any other nation. Our Western expansion is the American equivalent of British economic imperialism. The impact of industrialism upon our democratic social structure was curiously like in its results to the effect upon the class aristocracy of the British. We followed them, even

into war. Nor is it improbable that the great drama which Mr. Wingfield-Stratford describes will have its last act most clearly written, not in an England where triumphant Victorianism has been made once again dependent upon the military intrigues of Europe, but in an American continent which still may be able, like England of the nineteenth century, to have some control over its own destinies.

Surely no one will read these volumes without pleasure, illumination, and a great stimulus to memory, observation, and thought.

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

Those Earnest
VICTORIANS

Those Earnest
VICTORIANS

By *Esmé*
Wingfield-Stratford,
D.Sc., M.A.

*"In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
We are betrayed by what is false within."*

New York *Mcmxxx*
WILLIAM MORROW & CO.

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TO
LIEUT. COL. F. H. L. ERRINGTON, C.B.

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PREFACE

The period with which this book is mainly concerned is that of the middle class supremacy in England, and comprises, roughly, the four mid decades of the nineteenth century.

More than once I have drawn on my own memory and on private information. And I must apologise for the necessity that I have been under of suppressing certain names of those not so long dead, out of respect to the feelings of the living.

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Those Earnest
VICTORIANS

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CHAPTER I

THE SETTING

OLD-FASHIONED history affords the same sort of view of human development as you get, on ship-board, of the sea. The most magnificent of all spectacles unrolls itself before your eyes—the innumerable laughter of wavelets kissed by the sun, the Almighty's form glassing itself in tempests, more than a Swinburne could sing or a Turner paint, but not the movements of tide and current, the age-long work of erosion under the cliff-face, the dark and measureless depths beneath the keel.

Until well on in the last century, the storm raised by the French Revolution, the surge and thunder of the Napoleonic wars, riveted men's attention to the exclusion of all else. You have only to read as much as you can endure of Sir Archibald Alison's ten portly volumes on the History of Europe from 1789 to 1815, to realise what constituted that history in the eyes of the ensuing generation. Nothing but the monotonous tramp, tramp, in prose equally monotonous, of men in red and blue, in white and green, beneath the dust and through the slush of all the roads from Moscow to Lisbon, with occasional pauses to line up and blow each other off the face of the earth. Kingdoms rise and wither like Jonah's gourd, the map changes like a kaleidoscope, some two millions of lives are snuffed out, and things end up to all appearance where they started, with France back in the old frontiers

under the old dynasty, and the sovereigns of Europe putting back the clock to the eighteenth century and nailing the hands to the dial.

We have learnt a little more about that war than was apparent to the industrious Sir Archibald. Our eyes are no longer dazzled by the sunrise of Austerlitz or the sunset of Waterloo. It was an American admiral who, towards the close of last century, pointed to the "far distant, storm-beaten ships" of the British blockade, "on which the grand army never looked, and which stood between it and the domination of the world." But even he may hardly have realised that the decisive function of these ships, hells of human misery as most of them were, was to build a wooden wall round the new English factories, where employers, ruthlessly competing, with no other thought than that of making fortunes or averting ruin, organised hordes of overworked, underpaid, and villainously housed human beings, to turn out the cheap and often shoddy products, against which Napoleon and all his legions were powerless, in the long run, to contend. Salvoes of cannon thunder quicken the pulse more than the gradually increasing hum of power looms, and the smoke that darkened Moscow forms a spectacle more impressive than that which has never ceased to darken Salford.

Like a storm had the spirit unchained by the French Revolution swept over Europe, with the Man of Destiny seeming to ride it, and like a storm it had died away, leaving the shores strewn with wreckage, and men's hearts glad because they were at quiet. But the main currents were neither hurried nor diverted in their drift,

the work of erosion went on unperceived, and far beneath were depths hardly conscious of tumult and agitation on the surface.

Perhaps when, if ever, the time comes for us to view these events in their true perspective, the whole Napoleonic episode will strike us as an enormous—an enormously mischievous—irrelevance. For its precise importance lay in the fact that, at the most critical of all periods in human history, it diverted men's minds and energies from the things that really mattered, to the miserable squabble as to who should rule who—such nice questions as whether his tatters and vermin would sit less honourably on the back of a Spanish peasant under the rule of a rather silly Buonaparte than under that of a wholly blackguardly Bourbon, backed by the Inquisition; whether a bearded moujik would be happier having his grain requisitioned by a party of famishing conscripts, or the seignorial rod applied to his bare buttocks in the course of holy Russian routine. Whichever way these grave matters were ultimately decided, both peasants would probably be made to give up the ghost, not without agony, in the course of the debate. And all the while the Sphinx was putting her riddle, whose answer, if a better one could not be found in time, would be death for human civilisation. But nobody had time to listen.

In England, not even the surface of life had been violently disturbed by the storm that had swept over Europe. Whatever might happen abroad, John Bull was not to be hustled out of his genteel eighteenth century way of conducting war by professional armies, and even the press gang confined its attentions to the poor. Not only the

business, but the amenities and amusements of life went on undisturbed. During the year of Albuera, when Napoleon's power was at its height and our prospects at their gloomiest, the streets of London were blocked by crowds cheering home the hero, Tom Cribb, who, before upwards of 20,000 spectators, had succeeded in fracturing the jaw of the negro Molineaux. It was during the ensuing year that the Goodwood Cup was first run, the Gold Cup at Ascot having been started in 1807, the time that Wordsworth was penning his lines:

"We are left, or shall be left, alone,
The last that dare to struggle with the foe!"

And when Miss Austen wrote her immortal studies of English provincial life, so placid, and as trivial as if painted on china, it seems to have quite slipped her memory that there was a war on.

The invincible obstinacy with which our ruling class had persisted in the struggle against half a continent in arms, was born of a deep, subconscious determination to keep things as they were, to preserve intact the constitutional order of English society and the balance of European power. This purpose seemed to have been finally achieved when Napoleon stepped on to the deck of the *Bellerophon*, and the gentlemen of England, as magnanimous in victory as they had been relentless in their will to obtain it, might now peacefully devote themselves to the enjoyment of its fruits.

The problem presented by the French Revolution and its child Napoleon had only been brought to an effective, if rather tardy solution, by shelving one of far greater

moment, though of less immediate urgency. For England, thanks to the new machinery by which she had conquered Napoleon, was transforming not only her own, but the rest of Western civilisation. In the blind pursuit of wealth, she had dictated new conditions of life that might, or might not, turn out to be compatible with the existence of a creature with a brain and physique by no means superior to that of the cave man, at his best. Of an age of gamblers, it was the supreme gamble.

Such considerations were not of the kind likely to penetrate the hard skulls of lords and gentlemen during the Regency. As a class, they were little disposed to philosophise, and they were profoundly satisfied with themselves, the social order they adorned, and a constitutional system guaranteed to perpetuate it. Few of them, probably, either had, or desired, any personal acquaintance with the new and extremely unattractive towns that were coming into existence in the Midlands, and in the valleys on either side of the Pennines. As for what we should now call social reform, that sort of thing smacked too strongly of Jacobinism to make it safe to meddle with. To genteel palates, the old wine was better than such new, effervescent stuff.

But the social question was not to be burked so easily. Nobody had had time to attend to it during the war, nobody, that is, who counted, for agitators like Will Cobbett could be lumped under the genial designation of "blackguards." There was certainly young Lord Byron, who could protest to his fellow peers that never in his travels among the most despotic infidel countries had he beheld such squalid wretchedness as he had seen, since

his return, in the very heart of a Christian England. But Byron's voice, destined though it was to reverberate through Europe, was not loud enough to disturb the complacency of the British House of Lords, and the condition of the people was not, after all, a subject about which Byron himself was to manifest any very sustained interest. The home front had remained unbroken throughout the war—nobody had so much as dreamed of its breaking. There might be rioting and machine smashing reported now and then from the industrial districts, but the victories of Wellington, not to speak of Tom Cribb, provided news more exciting.

No doubt the general feeling among comfortably off people after the crowning mercy of Waterloo was that of the reader of conventional novels, who comes to the marriage in the last chapter, and closes the book in the blissful assurance that they will live ever happy afterwards. But it happens not unfrequently in real life that the chapter of accidents concluded at the altar is followed by a chapter of miseries that begins there. Hardly had the bonfires smouldered to ashes and the carillons died upon the breeze, than the condition of the people began to obtrude itself in a way not to be ignored even by Tory statesmen. The year after Waterloo was one of unprecedented misery. Industry was no longer doped by the demand for munitions, the labour market was flooded, and England's customers abroad were either too much impoverished to pay for her goods, or were beginning to use the new machinery on their own account, and protect their home markets against British competition. To crown all this, the harvest was one of the worst ever

known. Unemployment, distress, discomfort, were everywhere rife. The fruits of victory had no sooner been grasped, than they turned to ashes.

"The climax of misery," ran one workingmen's manifesto, "is complete, it can go no further. Death would now be a relief to millions."

Or as Shelley cried a few years later:

"Nay, in countries that are free,
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see."

With the menace of a European tyrant English rulers had often had to deal, but here was something new and ominous, quite beyond the mental scope of the well-meaning and usually kind-hearted gentlemen to whom the King's government was entrusted. It is not surprising that it found them without any constructive remedy whatever. The spectre of revolution was more apparent to them than that of starvation. Their duty, as they understood it, was to keep order, and most of them had the genial, eighteenth century faith in a Deity who, in some unexplained way, imparted a favourable tilt to his universe, and, if not too much interfered with, would make everything come right in the end.

So the menace of Jacobinism was sternly fought down, and after a few years the social crisis seemed to be mastered. The governing class still held all the cards. Its constitutional ascendancy seemed to be as impregnable as human contrivance could make it, when seats in Parliament were almost as much a matter of genteel patronage as livings in the church. As for anything the

mob might do, the position had never been so secure, now that there was a veteran standing army, whose rank and file, despite the inhuman conditions of its barrack life and the arbitrary torture of flogging, were sufficiently a caste apart to go anywhere and do anything at their officers' orders.

And after all, however hard might be the conditions of life in mills and mines, however merciless might be the competition between the new employers, it was not fashionable in those romantic days to look on reality naked. The fact that a labourer might here and there be found starved under a hedge, or that men and women were harnessed like beasts to the parish carts, did not prevent the England of Constable's landscapes from being an earthly Paradise to those who owned her soil. Thanks to duties on corn, that soil yielded comfortable incomes, and never, since the days of Nimrod, had there been better hunting.

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CHAPTER II

THE SQUIRE AND HIS RELATIONS

THESE is nothing more remarkable in the whole of English history, than the breakdown of aristocratic dominance within seventeen years of Waterloo, and this not by bloody revolution, but by peaceful surrender. The very Parliament whose franchise was so arranged as to make it the mouthpiece of the landed interest, voted another class into supreme power by what was finally an overwhelming majority, and the great nobles, little kings in their own sphere, with the mighty Wellington at their head, stood aside to let the hated measure pass.

How are we to account for this almost unbelievable sequel to the great victory, unless by an extension of Napoleon's dictum that in war the moral is to the physical as three to one? And indeed, in dealing with social movements, one is tempted to put it even higher. The Tory gentlemen had formed the class of all others fitted to win the war—their John Bullish self-complacency, their stolid incapacity for taking broad views or seeing anything but the task in hand, had excellently fitted them for doing the one thing needful, which was to maintain a bulldog grip on the enemy's throat until he dropped dead from exhaustion. But the bulldog is conspicuously lacking in those gifts of intellect and imagination requisite for the task of social reconstruction.

It would be ungenerous to record the failure of my

lords and gentlemen to deal with a situation so utterly beyond precedent, without recognising to how large an extent, in the past, they had justified their existence. If their wealth was derived from the soil, soil that only too frequently comprised the recently enclosed common lands of the peasantry, they had at least worked hard and scientifically to make that soil bear fruit. They had mobilised the land as the new employers had mobilised industry. From King George III, whose most lasting title to fame is his prefix "Farmer," and who transformed his Windsor estate from a wilderness into smiling arable and pasturage, from the fifth Duke of Bedford, whose agricultural gatherings at Woburn were on a scale of princely magnificence, and Coke of Norfolk, who worked in a smock frock and bequeathed the Norfolk rotation of crops, down to such small gentleman farmers as Miss Austen's—and Emma's—Mr. Knightly, with his weighty confabulations with his bailiff, the landed gentry had united in the task of making the land fruitful. If they enclosed, it was at least in order that they might substitute a scientific husbandry for obsolete methods consecrated by tradition. It does not justify the methods by which that enclosure was effected, if we acknowledge that if an agricultural revolution had not accompanied the first stages of that in industry, England would have inevitably have succumbed, amid all the horrors of famine, to the power of Napoleon. One has only to compare the respective functions of the English squires and French *noblesse* of the old régime, to understand the difference in their fates.

The landowners were something more than mere

farmers. If they were often tyrants, they were not absentee rent-drawers, like the courtiers of Versailles, but lived and worked—even the greatest and most selfish of them—among their people. “The Duke of Rutland,” writes Greville in 1838, “is as selfish a man as any of his class—that is, he never does what he does not like, and spends his life in a round of such pleasures as suit his taste, but he is neither a foolish nor a bad man, and partly from a sense of duty, and partly from inclination, he devotes time and labour to the interest and welfare of the people who live and labour on his estate. He is a guardian of a very large Union, and he not only attends the meetings of Poor Law Guardians every week or fortnight, and takes an active part in their proceedings, but he visits those paupers who receive out-of-door relief, sits and converses with them, and tells them that he is not only their friend, but their representative at the assembly of Guardians, and it is his duty to see that they are nourished and protected.”

No wonder then that, after witnessing a Gargantuan banquet given by the Duke to celebrate his own birthday—the cook had had to provide for nearly four hundred retainers and others in the castle—and after hearing Mr. Tapps, the head coachman, and “a man of great abdominal dignity,” wax eloquent in ducal panegyric, Greville would have liked to have seen the Radical who “sneers and snarls at the selfish aristocracy who have no sympathies with the people.”

Nor did the landowners stop short at living and working among their people. The frequently superior interest of the English temperament in questions of sport over

those of social betterment is no doubt the despair of reformers, but it must be taken into account by the historian. With all their faults, the gentry provided splendid entertainment. No doubt the sport of shooting, protected as it was by savage game laws and infernal machines in the shape of mantraps and spring guns, had little to be said for it from the poor man's standpoint, except that it must have provided a good deal of employment to gamekeepers and beaters. But a fox or hare hunt was an event in which everybody was in some degree interested, the farmers and yeomen with horses to ride, the "happy domestics" who, we are told, caught up the choruses that were wafted from the dining hall on the conclusion of a day's run, the yokels who saw what they could on foot and perhaps had the ecstatic privilege of holloaing hounds on to the tracks of "Mr. Reynolds"—finally the smaller squires, who were often sumptuously and even riotously entertained by their more important neighbours.

There is an account of one such gathering, towards the end of the eighteenth century, at the Duke of Dorset's seat at Knole, where, after the conclusion of something like a thirty-mile run with the Lullingstone pack, "The Duke took the head, as befitting his rank," but where, under the auspices of a mightier potentate, Bacchus, distinctions of rank were soon gloriously forgotten." *

There were also the extremely popular sports of racing and boxing, at which the gentry provided the horses and put up the purses, but in which all were equally inter-

* The account of both the run and the dinner were reprinted—I think some twenty years ago—in the *Kent Messenger*.

ested. In the crowds that watched these prodigiously long fights with bare fists, bucks and Johnny Raws rubbed shoulders, and were not unknown to have joined in breaking the ring. Indeed, it was a point of pride for the buck to be a man of his fists, and he did not disdain to offer the privilege of bodily combat to any bargee or butcher rash enough to insult him.

If we look at old prints of that time of brutal amusements, we shall see how the audiences at bear baitings, bull baitings, cock-fights, and even dog-fights, comprised the finest of gentlemen along with the lowest of roughs. And those two consummate young men of fashion, Pierce Egan's Corinthian Tom and Jerry, were at least anything but exclusive in their choice of amusement. They were as much at home swilling blue ruin in disreputable "sluiceries," or joining in the revels of "lascars, blacks, jack tars, coalheavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, etc.," all jigging together at "All-Max," in the East End, as they were when footing a stately quadrille on the polished floor of the real Almack's.

If this upper class failed to maintain its ascendancy in the years following Waterloo, it certainly was not owing to any lack of energy. A superabundance of vital spirits is what strikes us at once as its dominant trait. There was no epithet so popular or so coveted among its members as "manly." The manly man was a hard fighter, a hard rider, a hard liver, a hard drinker, a hard swearer and a hard lover. He was full blooded to an extent difficult to realise in an age whose stock of manliness tends

to be lessened in individuals owing to the necessity of partitioning it equally between the sexes.

And except where the Evangelical leaven was beginning to work, there was a lack of self-consciousness about this outpouring of vital energy that gives it a sort of inverted innocence. Mr. Max Beerbohm's description of the youthful George IV charging about like a bull in pursuit of pleasure, applies to him equally in his latter years, and to that brilliant and bizarre circle of which he was the centre. To realise how perfectly lacking in conviction of sin was the cult of genteel pleasure-seeking, we can cite—as among the least unpublishable of similar contemporary effusions—this, from *Life in London*:

But fornication every man enjoys—
A smart anchovy sandwich—that ne'er cloy—
A bonne bouche men are ready to *devour*—
Swallowing a neat half-dozen in an hour.
“Wedlock,” they cry, “is a hard-pinching boot,
But fornication is an easy shoe—
The first won't suit;
It won't do.”

There were many outlets for energy besides that provided by sexual incontinence, and the heart of the governing class was less in the West End than in the countryside, to which so many of its members remained happily rooted from year's end to year's end. ~~It was an age of great sporting characters, men who would back themselves extravagantly to perform the most unheard-of feats of physical or equestrian prowess.~~ It was only such an age that could have witnessed the almost incredible

career of John Mytton, a Shropshire squire who, before he had run through a fortune and shattered an iron constitution, left an imperishable name as a man without fear and one utterly regardless of the ordinary limitations of nature.

He would deliberately smash the gig he was driving against a bank, or gallop a tandem at a turnpike gate; he would go duck-shooting in the snow with nothing on but a night-shirt; he would ride into his drawing-room mounted upon a bear; he would cure himself of the hiccups by setting his shirt on fire, a feat that all but cost him his life and did cost him his reason. He drank at least six bottles of port a day, besides immense quantities of brandy. His notions of fun comprised his slyly inserting a red-hot coal into the pocket of some too loquacious companion, laying up his private chaplain for several weeks by knocking him over some rails, throwing his wife's lap-dog half way to the drawing-room ceiling, pushing the poor lady now into the lake, now into the kennel among his pack of hounds. "Nothing," his biographer tells us, "is impossible with God; nothing is improbable of the late John Mytton."

His was no doubt an extreme type, but it was only such an age that could have run to such extremities or accorded them a sort of hero-worship. Stories of old Jack Mytton are still rife in his native Shropshire. And there were other characters scarcely less famous in their day, Captain Ross, the owner of "Clinker," and hero of a partridge shooting match, from sunrise to sunset, for £1,000 a side—the match was drawn; the eccentric General Char-

retie* who, trespassing on Lord Salisbury's grounds and having had his dog shot by the keeper, promptly shot the keeper's pony, threatened to do as much for the keeper, and sent a challenge to the Marquis; there was Lord George Bentinck, not yet heard of as a politician, but more heard of than trusted as a sportsman; there was, finally, the great, little George Osbaldiston, never known as anything but the Squire, equally an adept with the bat, the gun, the pistol, and the reins.

These old country gentlemen, whose individual memories have now faded like that typical epitaph on their tombstones—"He lived respected and he died lamented"—did at least drain to the dregs their cup of life, as crude and intoxicating a draught as the punch into which—horrible to relate—the sweet essences of that day's fox's brush had been piously squeezed. Nay, one noble duke even went so far as to eat Reynard's head, devilled! They appear to have been perpetually quarrelling with, and not infrequently challenging one another. They made one another the victims of the crudest practical jokes. Their manners to inferiors were of brutal roughness—not necessarily felt as a humiliation in that rough time. We have John Mytton giving one of his "horse kicks" to a groom—a dishonest one certainly, but repentant—and that celebrated M.F.H., Mr. Musters, answering, quite as a matter of course, a yokel, who had informed him, correctly, that an earth was empty: "What can you know about it, you clodhopper?"

Perhaps nothing re-creates the atmosphere of this time so vividly as a shooting story I heard told, by an old Vic-

* See *Echoes Old and New* by Ralph Nevill, pp. 257-61.

torian gentleman, of the Duke of Wellington. It appears that some unfortunate sportsman had managed to pepper His Grace's gaiters through a hedge. Prompt in action as ever, the now aged victor of Waterloo rasped out—"Who shot that bird? Hold up his hand!" and as soon as the hand was displayed, put a charge of shot through it.

What might surprise us most, if we could take a journey in reverse gear on Mr. Wells's time machine, with an entrée to upper class society, would be its extraordinary grossness. Even though England was giving an unquestioned lead to the rest of Europe in the matter of cleanliness, baths, an Anglo-Indian importation, were few and far between, and the diminutive washstands tell their own tale. Sanitary arrangements were both primitive and noisome, though one certainly does read, in a letter to her mother from a young lady on a town visit, a rapturous account of her hostess's newly installed water closet. Even more conspicuous was the grossness of mind and conversation. One has only to delve into the more obscure literature of the time to realise how crudely Rabelaisian was the tone of male society. Caricaturists delighted in making human beings as disgusting as a brilliant pencil could. Jutting lips, enormous buttocks, bulbous bosoms, were what illustrators appeared to revel in. Nothing is spared—men being sick, women belching into each other's eyes, and episodes of an even cruder nature. Rabelaisian toasts were a feature of masculine conviviality, until Lord Melbourne, on the young Queen's accession, pressed for their discontinuance.*

There is a different tale to tell regarding female upper class society. The coarse sports and amusements of the

* Ralph Nevill, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

male gentry were not supposed to be shared by their women folk, who thus filled an important function as guardians of the refinements and amenities of life. Not a few of them, however, had their full share of the robust and defiant individualism so characteristic of the time: such a one for instance as Lady Hester Stanhope, whose career surpasses, in daring originality, that of the most famous lady explorers of our own day, travelling, as she did, under the escort of only a cowardly doctor and a terrified maid, into the wildest spots and among the most ferocious sheikhs of the untamed Near East.

One is struck by the independence of upper class women at this time. The confidences of Byron to Lady Melbourne shed a strangely modern light on the private lives of his numerous fair, and aristocratic, adorers. His position as host was decidedly embarrassing when Lady Frances Webster openly announced at the dinner table that she would not share a room with her husband when at Newstead; he also found the husband's confidences rather embarrassing to the effect that Frances declined to bear him more children. Mary Chaworth, who married the sporting Mr. Musters to whom we have already referred, left him on account of his addiction to vulgar mistresses. And which of our bright young things can surpass the Lady Caroline Ponsonby, who married the future Lord Melbourne, who used to disguise herself as a page in order to obtain admittance to Byron's rooms, who forged his hand in order to get his portrait from Murray's, and who, finally, entertained her friends by burning her too unresponsive lover in miniature, to the accompaniment of Sabbatical incantations?

But the typical lady of the squire class, in the twenties,

appears to have lived a life not very different from that described by Jane Austen, except that as the eighteenth century receded into the past, the quality Miss Austen so much prized, that of urbane reasonableness or "sense," was more and more being displaced by the new, romantic "sensibility."

Even in the country, social intercourse was crowded with gaiety. Reading old diaries of that time, one is struck by the incessant round of amusement trodden by the average young woman in what we should now know as the county set. The circle in which she moved was rigidly circumscribed, but within that circle the amenities must have been very delightful, after what we should now consider a rather simple fashion. There were perpetual balls, dinners, parties, and tea-drinkings, the last taking place in the late evening, subsequently to dinner, which would be served somewhere round about 6. The assembly rooms at the nearest market town were a great centre of entertainment, and on the whole a young lady, living in county society during the eighteen twenties, must have found it a good deal less dull than her counterpart nowadays.

As for town society, it was the Court that set the tone, and George IV—who surely had unrivalled opportunities for knowing—had declared, when Prince of Wales, that he knew only two honest women in London. Since then the growing vogue of romantic sensibility had encouraged susceptible charmers to consider all bonds, including that of the marriage vow, well snapped for love. Such characters as the Lady Wanton of *Life in London* must have been pretty common, even within the jealously guarded portals of Almack's.

A feature of the time is the stress laid upon accomplishments. References in diaries are continually being made to performing upon the harp, trying the new pianoforte, or studying Italian. In the entourage of Tom and Jerry the very "Cyprians" of a superior order make a point of their Accomplishments, with a big A, not the least of these being the modish execution of "that lascivious dance," the waltz. In comparison with their Victorian successors, ladies seem to have done little work with their hands, except for the strangely popular pursuit of netting purses—and one wonders what can have become of all the immense output of this industry, or how far the demand was kept up by the activities of Artful Dodgers!

A *grande dame*, Lady Ailesbury, writing in 1810, thus delivers herself:

"I . . . abominate the modern education of females. The drift of it is to make them artists and nothing else, which, if they were to earn their bread, might be useful. The mind and morals are never thought about, the head is cramfull of rubbish. My eldest granddaughter is said to be fourteen; there can be no doubt she is, for she was sixteen last birthday. She is not a fool, but in mind and manners a baby, but not young, none of the cordiality and candour of youth, very cold manners, and the only specimen of being like a woman is a propensity to quiz: a kind of nondescript being.*

The modern girl seems to get more modern the further she recedes in time.

* *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio*, Vol. III, p. 270.

CHAPTER III

A PHYSICAL CULTURE

Now that we have seen something of the upper class life in the generation preceding the Reform Bill, we shall be less astonished at the failure of the landed gentry to maintain that virtual monopoly of political power that, at the time of Waterloo, seemed unassailable. These squires and noblemen had certainly enough and to spare of vital energy; they fulfilled their own ideal of being thoroughly and robustly manly. But a wealth of energy, without a corresponding wealth of intellect, runs to waste in unprofitable channels—the pursuit of pleasure in town, the pursuit of sport in the country, are carried on with no less concentrated earnestness than had sufficed for the classical Renaissance in the fifteenth century or the young Church of the first century.

Nobody can study the records of this time, without realising how rapidly the old, eighteenth century culture was running to seed. There was certainly a great deal of literary lion hunting, and the enormous success of Byron's Oriental poems show that there was still an upper class demand for good work, of a rather obvious kind. There were also intellectual centres like Holland House, with its brilliant Whig circle, but even here the brightest scintillations were struck from representatives of the middle class, men like Macaulay, Wilkie and Mackintosh. Certainly the mightiest and the most ethereal poetry of

the time came, respectively, from a peer, and a youth, who—to the confusion of modern critics—somehow failed to be a Celt, and issued from a family of South-country squires. But their own class showed their appreciation of Byron and Shelley by making England too hot to hold the one and ignoring the other. And they found no successors.

The two principal organs of Tory culture, *The Quarterly* and *Blackwood's*, constituted themselves into a veritable inquisition for the suppression of budding genius. Whether or not one of them performed the feat of killing John Keats may be open to question, that they did their generous best—*The Quarterly* by trying to annihilate a poem of which its reviewer admitted having read no more than the first few lines, and *Blackwood's* by the vilest personal abuse—there can be no question whatever. In all the records of Philistinism, naked and triumphant, there is nothing capable of vying with *The Quarterly's* effort to dispose of the *Prometheus Unbound*, in which one of the sublimest passages in English poetry is printed as prose, and left, as sure and final evidence of Shelley's damn-worthiness, for the perusal of *The Quarterly's* readers. These effusions, whose enormous pomposity must have demanded a certain skill, of a kind, were seldom the work of gentlemen born, but more often of their jackals, such hacks as Gifford, such converted revolutionaries as Southey.

No doubt, as compared with that of our own day, the standard of upper class culture will appear high—perhaps even highbrow. A certain distinction—even if it were a pompous distinction—of speech and writing was re-

quired of every gentleman, and was exacted by him from the writers who catered for his needs. His very slang was ordered by rules as elaborated as those that had governed the composition of his "construe" at Eton. Here is a specimen of the sort of conversation that was expected from a young man about town, the funny man of the Tom and Jerry saga, Bob Logic, "the Oxonian":

"So say I, and you may travel from Dan to Beersheba and cry 'all is barren.' But I am not one of that description. I am for life and a curricule, and as it is the *opinion* of a noble Law Lord, given without a *fee*, a man of the most distinguished talents and eloquence, *that a little MIRTH in this MELANCHOLY LIFE is a good thing*, I mean to act upon it. The *unmasking* at the supper table, my dear boy, you will enjoy, as it is often a great source of laughter and surprise, when it discovers the faces of numerous acquaintances who have been playing off their wit and raillery against each other all the evening, under their various disguises. A MASQUERADE is an *unsorted* class of society, I readily admit, but . . . if you keep *aloof* from mankind on that account, you may soon become a crying philosopher, afraid to stir from your own fireside, in order to prevent *contamination*, and be devoured by hypochondriacism the remainder of your days. It principally depends, in my humble opinion, on the strength of mind possessed by the persons themselves."

At this point, we are told, Logic, who was already well primed with liquor, was interrupted by their arrival at Covent Garden for the night's orgie. It would be an interesting exercise to translate his harangue into modern Oxonian. This extraordinarily florid habit of genteel

speech and writing is characteristic of the time, and Surtees's Pomponius Ego is so closely modelled on the renowned sporting critic, "Nimrod," as hardly to be a caricature. A perusal of surviving correspondence, or of the columns of Hansard, is enough proof that to express oneself like a gentleman demanded at least a veneer of acquaintance with the classics, and a reasonable proficiency in the sort of drill by which English prose had been redeemed from its seventeenth century indiscipline and made to keep time by correct Johnsonian measure.

But this upper class culture, though it might masquerade in the forms of the eighteenth century, retained little of its spirit. There was no scope in the twenties for the urbane magnificence of a Chesterfield or Horace Walpole's inexhaustible capacity for elegant trifling. Such a life as Gibbon's, such steady concentration of purpose on one intellectual end, such serene elevation above the insular and the provincial, had no counterpart after Waterloo, nor is it easy to conceive of one of the friends of George IV's last years plunging, like Charles Fox, into Euripides, to console himself for the loss of a fortune at the tables.

It is not only in speech and writing that the decline of upper class culture, since the eighteenth century, is apparent. The great gentlemen of that age of knee-breeches and ruffles may have shamefacedly exploited their monopoly of political power, they may have led selfish and scandalous lives, but they did at least impose a standard of good taste on those who ministered to their well-being. They built for themselves suitably imposing mansions, they surrounded themselves with lovely furni-

ture, they had themselves painted by masters, they filled their libraries with beautifully bound copies of all purchasable English and foreign classics; their dress, their deportment, elegant without ostentation, proclaimed them artists of life.

All this gradually altered with the coming of the nineteenth century. The demand for beauty is no longer insistent or discriminating enough to call forth supply on anything like the old scale. The great age of furniture ends with Sheraton, and though the decline to the Early Victorian is not as steep or catastrophic as people, who have not studied the matter for themselves, are wont to believe, only affectation could pretend that there can be any comparison of nineteenth with eighteenth century furniture. It is the same with the manufacture of porcelain, despite the stimulus that this had obtained from the improved processes that were a by-product of the Industrial Revolution. But beauty is born of the soul and not of the machine, and all the wheels and chimneys of the Black Country could not give birth to one little china shepherdess of the lost exquisiteness, or perpetuate the secret of Wedgwood.

The mansions that were put up to house the great landowners, and to express their dignity, show a similar falling off from eighteenth century standards. They ceased, in fact, to be dignified, and became merely pretentious. This was not from lack of means to carry on the old tradition. The early nineteenth century was a time of high rents and lavish expenditure, and many of the finest houses in the kingdom were built, or drastically reconstructed, during this time. During the Regency,

the classic tradition was enjoying a St. Martin's summer in the stucco and plaster architecture of Nash, but in the country the Gothic fashion had set in, and nothing would suffice our county magnates but to surround themselves with the trappings of feudalism, in the style of a Walter Scott novel. The typical eighteenth century mansion, with its foursquare honesty of construction and its not inharmonious classical portico, did at least express with perfect sincerity its owner's ideal of intellectual elegance. But now the mansion had turned into a castle, sprouting wholly useless battlements and bristling with towers that served no purpose either of defence or convenience. If it expressed anything, it was the desire of a rather stupid person to impress everybody in view with his own importance.

This architecture of shams was capable of the most ridiculous extravagances. It was not without reason that its most conspicuous efforts have been christened "follies," the prototype of them all having been Beckford's monkless Abbey of Fonthill, which cost half a million pounds to put up, and soon tumbled down like a card-house, being unprovided with foundations. The newly castelated strongholds of feudal baronage in top boots, if less palpably unsound, were far less interesting than Beckford's expensive toy. They were, at best, dull, the type of building described in guide-books as "handsome and imposing." At worst they were monuments of vulgarity.

ture, one of the machicolated turrets was actually surmounted by a gigantic coronet.

Even in dress—at least so far as men's dress is concerned—and manners, there is a marked decline from the standard of taste that had prevailed before the Revolution. It was unfortunate that George IV and his brothers, who were the natural leaders of polite society, and whose influence might have kept alive the tradition of Versailles, were essentially vulgarians, whose German ancestry was displayed in a certain full-blooded grossness, and a heaviness of touch, but who were wholly lacking in German depth and soulfulness. The society of the Pavilion and Carlton House, with its monotony of drinking, drabbing, and damning, might have made Charles II turn in his grave!

The eighteenth century had been the heyday of elegance in dress, especially male dress, as the heavy wigs and clothes of the Pudding Age gave way to the more graceful fashions that prevailed during the first half of George III's reign. The Revolution here, as elsewhere, had its influence in upsetting standards of aristocratic taste. The one definite gift we accepted from the Jacobins was the top hat, of portentous import. It was a harmless, even a pretty thing, in its infancy, shaped like an inverted flower-pot; but the flower-pot was father to the cylinder, that funereal extinguisher of the old finery and *joie-de-vivre*.

For a time there was an over-emphasis on dress, a sartorial self-consciousness, that was the sure prelude of decadence. The Regency, in particular, was a time of dandies, men like Beau Brummell, whose whole energies

were concentrated and whose fortunes squandered on their personal adornment. Even about the great Beau himself, with his perpetual, self-assertive insolence, there is a certain element of what a later age would have describe as the bounder. But in dress, he was an artist of an almost classic restraint; his aim was the self-satisfaction that comes from perfect achievement; he was above the vulgarity of soliciting attention to himself by consciousness of attire. Lord Byron—no mean judge—declared that there was nothing remarkable about his dress except a certain exquisite propriety. This, however, could not have been said of the generation of dandies that flourished in the later twenties, and included the young Disraeli, with his oiled locks and bejewelled fingers—Disraeli, who scandalised the Governor of Malta by paying his respects in Andalusian garb—least of all could it have been said of that French leader of English fashion, Lady Blessington's enamoured Count d'Orsay, whose costume and appearance constituted a masterpiece of flaunting self-advertisement. And beyond d'Orsay lay the sombre wilderness of utilitarian respectability, and the Victorian top hat, grown into a monstrous extinguisher, put out the last lights of Georgian dandyism.

The French Revolution, which had swept the aristocracy of Versailles to exile and the guillotine, had affected the English upper class in a more subtle, but, in the long run, hardly less injurious way. For that class was now cut off from its most fruitful source of inspiration and thrown back upon its own insular resources. "*La brutalité anglaise*"—as its vaunted "manliness" was called South of the Channel—luxuriated unchecked. The

Horace Walpoles, the Chesterfields, and the Gibbons, left no successors, unless we are to count that ineffable young novelist, who wore stays and poured out his romantic soul in highly artificial but quite inexhaustible prose—Bulwer-Lytton. The breed of Squire Western had prevailed as surely as the pretty red squirrels, in our own time, have been driven out by their stronger and less attractive grey cousins. What wonder that the Upper Class Tories could not retain the leadership of the nation, when their own ranks could no longer furnish leaders for themselves, but had perforce to submit to the thoroughly bourgeois Peel, and, after him, to a hated and despised Jewish parvenu, who happened not only to have been born in a library—for that matter any great country seat would probably have been found to contain as fine a collection of books as the house of old Isaac Disraeli—but to have used it for the enrichment of his brains. Where the treasure is—whether in the library or the hunting field—there will the brain also thrive or run to seed.

CHAPTER IV

MECHANISATION

WHILE the people who enjoyed, in so unstinted a measure, the blessings of leisure and vital energy, were thus squandering both in muscular debauches or in the satisfaction of their cruder instincts, beyond their park walls and stucco frontages a revolution was taking place more momentous in its consequences than that of Jacobin France, only in England the aristocrats had not the sharp reminder of the *Place de la Révolution* to bring home to them the realities of the situation. Rather did they resemble those Olympians of Lucretius, who, secure in their adamantine palaces, dreamed and banqueted in sublime indifference to whatever might be the fate of the teeming hordes of men below.

When the 10th. Hussars, in which Beau Brummell had condescended to hold a commission, were ordered to Manchester, in 1798, this distinguished cavalry officer promptly left the service. "I really could not go," he explained to his friend, the Prince of Wales. "Think, your Royal Highness, Manchester!" This—in the year of the Second Coalition, the Nile, and the great Irish Rebellion—certainly does give food for thought:

This is not the place to detail the history of the Industrial Revolution. We are gradually, and only gradually, beginning to view that tremendous process in sober perspective. Appreciation of it has passed through four

phases, which are distinct enough, though it would be hard to say where any one of them begins or ends. During the first of these, no great account was made of the Industrial Revolution. Just as soldiers of the old school were unwilling to soil their uniforms by dabbling with the products of science, so the old type of historian felt that the dignity of his prose was better sustained by wars and genteel politics than the wages of cotton-spinners and the woes of chimney sweeps. Accordingly the History of England is vastly concerned as to whether a vulgar Queen had or had not added the embraces of a menial Italian to those of a priapic monarch, it waxes epical over the drowning and shelling to death of a number of Turks at Navarino, and it is never tired of unravelling the political combinations that preceded the Reform Bill, and subsequently exhausted the talents of those large men in stocks and whiskers, who used to impress one's boyish imagination so much in the pre-fire Madame Tussaud's.

Gradually, as the Victorian head expanded in harmony with the Victorian stomach, it began to be realised that something important really had taken place, that could be comprehended neither under the heading of slaughter nor that of intrigue. Progress had been at work, a Deity more inevitably beneficent in his mysterious workings than any of those worshipped in temples made with hands. He was a veritable god from the machine, machinery that got better with every passing day. The improving Sunday book was reinforced by the weekday horror that strove to interest the young mind in the exploits of George Stephenson and the inventors of jennys

and power looms. The Industrial Revolution was a time when villas had replaced cottages, and such lovely cities as Salford and Sheffield had expanded out of insignificance, to bask under a pillar of perpetual cloud by day. The Industrial Revolution had, in fact, been the time when John Bull, like certain carp at Versailles, had developed the capacity of getting fatter and fatter through an indefinite period of time—perhaps for ever. And what more could any worshipper of Progress demand from his god?

With the dawning of a new century Progress began to go out of fashion. The condition of the People began to be talked about, and Class War, and the gospel of Karl Marx. Earnest researchers began to look a little more closely into this business of an Industrial Revolution, and, like the apostles of Progress before them, discovered exactly what they had come to look for. The suffering, the cruelty, the squalid horror involved in the process of mechanising England, were set out in the dry light of statistics and established by the evidence of long-forgotten documents. Pity and indignation were enlisted in the support of preconceived theory. The Revolutionary stage was set for a melodrama, whose villains consisted of common-enclosing landlords and skinflint factory owners. The whole of the possessing classes would appear to have been leagued in heartless conspiracy to appropriate the fruits of toil from their simple and pathetic producers. This was a story that lost nothing in the telling by earnest propagandists.

But melodrama is a crude form of entertainment, and less interested research is beginning to show that the Industrial Revolution was, in the profoundest sense, a

tragedy, in which "no villain need be." The fevered imagination of a Shelley might cast the heads of the State for the parts of embodied Murder, Hypocrisy and Fraud, but take them for all in all, the landowners and employers of England appear to have been neither heartless nor predatory, and indeed the principal fault with which they are to be charged is that, when they were confronted simultaneously with the most formidable military opponent we had ever faced and a social transformation unprecedented in history, their thoughts moved in the old grooves and were incapable of devising more than hand-to-mouth expedients for tiding over an immediate crisis.

Even the enclosure of the commons turns out to have been a device on the part of genuinely improving landlords for ending an intolerable system and making two blades of corn grow where one had grown before. It can fairly be claimed that if the land of the country had not been mobilised in this way, Napoleon would have starved us out. The hardship of the scheme consisted in the fact that the big man could afford to enclose and the small man could not, so that something more than a formal equality was required in the distribution of burdens. To such heights of imaginative generosity the governing class failed to soar, and the formal justice that they generally sought and ensued turned out to be ruinously unjust in practice. Villains were they none, but human beings, with an all too human bias in adjudicating on cases to which they themselves were parties.

Nor were the horrors of the early factory system—dire as they undoubtedly were—due to any special wickedness on the part of employers or governments.

Inhuman conditions of employment, long hours, and low wages, were rife long before the Industrial Revolution. The most crying scandal of all, that of the boy chimney sweeps, stunted, terrorised, half-starved little wretches, was a heritage of the polite century, and had nothing whatever to do with the new inventions. It does not appear, according to the weighty authority of Dr. Clapham, that the standard of living of the average workman was in any way depressed by the advent of machinery. Its tendency was in fact to rise. And the enormous increase of population turns out to have been due principally to the fact, not that the birth-rate had increased, but that the death-rate had, since 1740, been steadily going down, owing to improved sanitation and the advance of medical science.

The real tragedy of the Industrial Revolution lay in the fact that it demanded an utterly different type of mind to effect the necessary adjustment of life to its new conditions, than had sufficed for the requirements of eighteenth century civilisation. The idea that the new centres of population might be made as beautiful as any Florence or Nuremberg, would have struck that hard-headed generation as excellent fooling. Not even the most advanced politicians of the eighteenth century had envisaged what we should now call social reform as an essential part of statesmanship. And during those all-important years when the social problem was beginning to clamour for solution, their wills were almost entirely bent to the purpose of beating the foreign enemy.

Such a statesman as the younger Pitt, whose prudent administration of the national finances had raised the country, in a few years, from the depths of depression

following a disastrous war to something like her former prestige and affluence, might conceivably have been great enough to have comprehended and mastered the new situation, had he been free to give it his undivided attention. But Pitt was lifted up in the nation's eyes as the man who could save England from an immediate and crying peril. He was the pilot who weathered the storm. And a pilot in a storm has no time to undertake an overhaul of the vessel.

As an expedient for tiding over the crisis, it is probable that the magisterial socialism by which wages were supplemented out of rates and some sort of employment provided for all, was about as humane and effective as any that could have been devised. Its bad effects, particularly in increasing the pauper population, seem to have been exaggerated. No doubt, as a permanent solution of the problem, a measure that at one time placed about a quarter of the population on the rates was demoralising to the last degree. But it enabled the country to carry on during the war, and to make some sort of provision for the population that Napoleon was trying to starve out.

The measure that made combinations among workmen illegal ought to be regarded as one of martial law, and we can only understand the motives of its authors by putting ourselves into their position, with the spectacle of triumphant revolution before their eyes, and the exaggerated but very understandable fear in their hearts of secret societies or combinations that might harbour the germ of Jacobinism. Above all, it was necessary to keep the wheels of industry going without friction. It was cotton that beat Napoleon.

After the war, the habits of mind ingrained in the Tory rulers were too strong to be eradicated. Napoleon had gone to Saint Helena, but the Jacobin menace was ever before their eyes. A revolutionary spirit, they felt, was abroad; the least pandering to democratic ideals might open the floodgates of revolution. They had come to worship the Constitution as if it were something perfect and unchangeable—a panacea against every sort of evil. The very idea of a reorganisation of society would have filled most of them with terror, though some of the intellectuals among them, like Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, were putting out cautious feelers in the direction of social reform. But even with their Whig opponents, reform seldom meant much more than reforming the franchise.

But while those in authority averted their eyes from reality and allowed things to take their course, the greatest of all revolutions was gathering momentum. Steam power had come to reinforce machinery, and now the railway and the steamboat were beginning to revolutionise transport. A new England was springing up in the North and Midlands, that not the wildest stretch of imagination could have described as “merrie.” Squalid and smoke-begrimed towns grew with mushroom rapidity, providing some sort of shelter for enormous herds of human beings, worked to the limit of endurance and cut off from all the beauties and amenities of civilisation. It was a spectacle that caused such a heart as Macaulay’s to rejoice greatly. God—if we are allowed to assume His existence—may perhaps have wept.

CHAPTER V

THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

As the war, and the French menace, receded into the past, it became more and more apparent that some sort of adjustment of the social order to its rapidly changing circumstances had got to be made. Crusted reactionaries, like the Lord Chancellor Eldon, were becoming more and more of an anachronism—to the young Disraeli he was “Lord Past Century.” It was something like a forlorn hope when the Iron Duke assumed the premiership in a supreme effort to arrest the forces making for change, as he had held up Masséna before Lisbon, and Napoleon before Brussels. But now he found himself helpless to maintain discipline among his own headquarters staff, and the choice of Talavera and Burgos was repeated, between retreat and annihilation. The saviour of his country could not preserve his own window panes, and was once in no small danger of being murdered in the streets—and on Waterloo day! The victor of a hundred fights had become a figure of fun, an old woman with a mop trying to hold up the tide.

But assuming that a change was to come, from what quarter were its direction and driving impulse to be looked for? Not, evidently, from the class entrenched in power by the existing Constitution. Genius like that of Thomas Smith, whose system of casting hounds is a model to such modern masters as may chance not only

to ride but to read, might have been capable of equally enduring achievement in the planning of towns or in raising the conditions of the people. If all the talent and energy spent in avenging the rape of hen-roosts and compassing the downfall of partridges, had been mobilised for the things that really mattered, the gentlemen of England might indeed have loosened their hold on the rotten boroughs, but established it for generations upon the affections and support of the people in all Europe most loyally disposed towards leaders they can respect. What, in the Young England movement, was only a romantic dream, might have become a reality, though whether in the long run to be wished for or deplored is a matter in which opinions may differ.

But if the upper class—that of the landed gentry—was thus tried and found wanting, still less was salvation to be looked for at the other end of the social scale. From the country labourers, the Johnny Raws and Chawbacons, whom the loss of their commons had sunk into a condition of wage-slavery and wholesale pauperisation, the utmost that could be expected was such blind and futile resentment as broke out in the Swing Riots, when threshing machines were broken up and the night sky flickered with the reflection of rick-fires. As for the new industrial districts, the masses of overworked men, cut off, for the most part, from any environment or influence that could possibly make for civilisation, could hardly be expected to rise above the brutality and brutishness of the gin-sodden, eighteenth century mob that had burned down Newgate in the cause of true religion, and a scientist's library in that of patriotism. There was in-

deed an aristocracy of labour already beginning to form, skilled and often highly paid mechanics and engineers, striving for the improvement of their minds in institutes, but this was as yet too small a leaven to affect the whole lump. The brutalities and defeats of early trades unionism, the pricking of the great Chartist bubble, were proof enough that the hour for the working class had not yet struck. It needed many years of education and experience in self-help, before it would be able to come forward with a practical policy of its own, and leaders capable of executing it.

So that, whatever the need might be of reform, in a wider sense than that understood by the politicians, it is certain that neither among the upper nor the lower ranks of society was there the mind or the will to undertake it. By a process of exhaustion, this task, if it was to be undertaken at all, must devolve upon a middle class, already more important in England than in any other country, and whose power was continually growing. There is no need to split hairs over the definition of what, for all practical purposes, is well enough understood. In the twenties, the boundary between upper and middle was recognised on both sides, and was that which, at the county ball, separated the gentry, who danced at the top end of the room, from their humble admirers and imitators who occupied the rest of it. It was a boundary none the less respected from the fact that individuals were not infrequently permitted to pass over. Between middle and lower, the exact frontier may have been a little harder to trace—it would have run somewhere be-

tween the Cratchit and the Weller families—but on which side should we put Mr. Bumble?

It has been the strength of English society, that though it had its class distinctions, it never had anything like the caste exclusiveness that was the ruin of the French *noblesse*. English history moreover resembles a fairy tale, in which the most important rôle is that of the younger son, who goes out into the world to seek his fortune. Those hordes of sons and daughters, stiffly huddled on their knees, one behind the other, at the foot of parental monuments, had their way to make, by work or by marriage, and followed the main chance with little enough regard for the restrictions that would have bound a Frenchman of noble blood to the service of Christ or of Mars. Many of them ventured overseas, in every sort of capacity from planter to pirate; some of them entered the ranks of honourable trade at home, thinking it no scorn even to be bound as apprentices.

On the other side, prosperous burghers and substantial yeomen, who formed the middle class in Stuart times, and who had been the backbone of the Great Rebellion, were by no means disposed to truckle unduly to the prestige that comes by blood. Your alderman, whose profits in trade suffice for his commemoration in Church, will stick out his marble stomach as portentously or engrave his tablet as pompously as the finest gentleman ever enclosed in lead. And this was no new thing, for as far back as the Middle Ages, royalty itself had not been ashamed to sit at the board of a Bristol ship-owner or to connect itself by marriage with a family of Hull merchants.

It is probable that the eighteenth century saw an actual widening of the social gulf between birth and trade. The court of Versailles set the standard of upper class civilisation all over Western Europe, and the formal dignity that hedged those gentlemen with powdered hair and knee breeches, who trifle so elegantly in engravings like those of Woollett, made them probably more unapproachable than the rough and ready cavaliers from whom they were descended. Quite at the beginning of the century *The Spectator* has an amusing picture, drawn from a known model, of a certain ironmaster, one Jack Anvil, who so throve that he became Sir John Enville, and married Lady Mary Oddly, a step he lived to repent, as he found himself treated with open contempt in his own house, and only recognised by his "in-laws" for purposes of sponging.

Nevertheless, money continued to talk, and to talk with increasing loudness towards the end of the century, as the opportunities for making it multiplied. A class of *nouveaux riches* began to force their way into the upper strata of society under the significant name of Nabobs, men who had squeezed fortunes out of the sweat and misery of John Company's wretched subjects in the Ganges valley. Others exploited the labour of black slaves in West Indian sugar plantations. And the Industrial Revolution was beginning to provide unprecedented opportunities for quick affluence or ruin.

At the time of which we are writing, that between Waterloo and the Reform Bill, there was probably as much formal exclusiveness hedging the charmed circle of London and county "society," as at any time since the

Reformation, and the young gentleman of the period would probably have been much more chary of soiling his hands with trade than his ancestor in the sixteenth centuries. But money is power, and in a society like the English, where the whole stock of blue blood is exhausted after the first male birth, social prestige will tend, slowly but irresistibly, to express itself in terms of bank balances. Money was a commodity too urgently in demand not to be bartered—after however prolonged and discreet a chaffering—for recognition or dignity. That very businesslike champion of Toryism, Mr. Pitt, fully understood with what fuel the furnaces of party machinery are stoked, and Mr. Pitt controlled the fountain of honour. It would have been a pity to let those golden and expensive waters run to waste in fertilising unremunerative merit. Corruption in politics was of course no new thing, but the old methods of Walpole and Newcastle were behind the times. The essence of eighteenth century corruption was the purchase of votes by money. The nineteenth century specialised more and more in the purchase of money by what was, with unconscious irony, known as honour. This was the outward and visible sign of the preponderance of monetary power having shifted from land, and therefore from birth, to business.

It is significant that when Pierce Egan wanted to depict the *ne plus ultra* of dashing gentility in his Corinthian Tom, he should have made that hero the son of a self-made man.

The invisible barriers stood, but they could be, and

were, scaled by individuals who climbed to the top on their own money bags. The law had always provided a ladder for humble merit to climb by, and even medicine, though the ordinary doctor was still treated as not much better than the old-fashioned apothecary, was not without its prizes. The Prime Minister Addington, afterwards Lord Sidmouth, whose charming and pious exterior masked an abysmal mental vacuum, was the son of a fashionable physician, and on this account was saddled with the contemptuous nickname of "Doctor." The effect of the Industrial Revolution may be seen in the rise of the Peel family, originally of yeoman stock. The father of the great Sir Robert had made a fortune out of the new cotton-spinning machinery, and been duly rewarded, by Mr. Pitt, with a baronetcy. The son, whose talents eventually enabled him to take over, from the politically bankrupt Wellington, the leadership of the Tory party, brought a mind and manner typically bourgeois to its refashioning.

But those members of the middle class who achieved gentility, or affluence, were after all a very small minority. For the immense majority life was a drab struggle for existence, under the stress of merciless competition. Scant leisure was theirs, and few amenities. But this very struggle, whose intensity grew as life itself was speeded up to keep pace with its attendant machinery, acted as a forcing house of character. The middle class was as grimly in earnest in the pursuit of the main chance, as the leisured gentry in that of the fox. The great Industrial Revolution, that was transforming Western Civil-

isation, was, so far as it can be said to have been controlled at all, under middle class leadership and direction. From that class emanated most of the genius and nearly all of the formative ideas and ideals. Mr. Chesterton was profound as well as brilliant in talking of an age of inspired office boys.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW RULING CLASS

WHEN we speak of the middle class at the opening of the Victorian Age, we feel that we have entered an atmosphere thoroughly familiar to us. When we transport ourselves, in imagination, to one of those old county balls, we have to confess that our friends are all among the worthy people who are excluded from the genteel reservation of the upper end of the room. Here, in the ruck, we shall jostle shoulders with Mr. John Jor-rocks and Mr. Caudle, Mr. Titus Ledbury and Mr. Pick-wick—perhaps young Mr. Dickens himself. But if we presume to pass that invisible barrier, we shall at once feel ourselves outsiders. What point of spiritual contact have we with John Mytton—or Corinthian Tom, with Count d'Orsay or Pomponius Ego? We have passed from a familiar to an almost incredible atmosphere, and have no right to complain of the cold shoulder with which we shall be received.

There is an even deeper sense in which this atmosphere of the middle class, at the dawn of the Victorian Age, is familiar to us. For it is what many of us, born in the latter years of the Queen Empress, and imbued with their philosophy, were taught to believe in as pervading the universe. It was not love that moved the sun and the other stars, but merciless competition, red in tooth and claw, with the devil perpetually taking the hindmost and

the fittest surviving, the fittest, that is to say, to survive in a universal Black Hole of Calcutta, where God's creatures fight without truce and trample one another to death for a breath at the solitary window.

It was what struck the sensitive soul of the young Heine, when he came to London, and stood amid the roar and bustle of Cheapside. "Send no poet to London," he pleads. The dreamy Teuton, who delights to stare at print and jeweller's shops, will find himself hustled from all sides, or bowled over with a mild "*God damn! God Damn!*" For John Bull, with his enormous expenses and enormous debts, has got to be racking his brains night and day to discover new machines, to be balancing ledgers with the sweat of his brow, to be ever violently on the move looking neither to right nor left, from the Docks to the Exchange, from the Exchange to the Strand. The day-long rush of humanity up and down Cheapside reminds Heine of that most dreadful of all episodes in the retreat from Moscow, the passage of the Beresina Bridge, whereon every one struggled madly forward to preserve his scrap of existence, where friends trod callously over each other's corpses, where thousands clung vainly to the planks before slipping into the ice-cold waters, and where to fall was to be lost forever.

This was what the Industrial Revolution had come to mean, when translated into terms of everyday life. Not only machinery, but life itself, had been speeded up to an extent undreamed of in the stolid days of Hogarth and Walpole. Nor was it practicable to call a halt and return to the old order of things. An English Tolstoy

or Gandhi could only have effected a return—even at this early stage—to the old domestic handicrafts and common field agriculture, by passing a death sentence on millions. Machines and enclosures had brought England victoriously through the war; still more machinery and protected agriculture were what kept the population somehow alive between the starving teens and the hungry forties; after that, machinery unlimited and imported corn ushered in the piping or hooting times of the Victorian heyday.

For it gives an entirely false impression of the situation, to imagine that during the thirty years after the war, British industry was achieving anything like a rapid or easy conquest of the world's markets. The declared official value of the produce and manufactures exported from the United Kingdom was, in the year of Waterloo, about five and a half million pounds. During the whole of the twenties, without exception, the figure was well below forty millions, and it was only four years later after the Reform Bill that the fifty million mark was touched again. As late as 1842, the figure was barely forty-seven millions. Even allowing for the difference in money values caused by the return to cash payments, this tells no very flattering tale of industrial progress. The enormous, the sensational advance, when figures doubled and quadrupled—and attained to such fantastic proportions that John Bull was able to proclaim himself the world's shopkeeper, banker and paragon of success—these were to come in the generation following the repeal of the Corn Laws. During the twenties and thirties, English industry was fighting a dour and bitter

struggle to adapt the new conditions to the attainment of honest livelihood.

In order to understand the social system of these decades, we must remember that it was based upon the existence of a privileged and leisured upper class, who alone were able to evade the unremitting toil and cut-throat competition that were the lot of those outside the pale. They alone had the leisure to live well, according to their ideals. But what ideals? Their opposite to work was play, their alternative to thinking of the main chance was to think as little as possible. And so they ceased to lead—almost ceased to count—in the shaping of whatever new order was to be born of the chaos below.

The middle class man had the advantage that he was at least in contact with reality, though a hard and sordid reality. If he worked for a salary, he was more often than not compelled to put up with such sweating as a Scrooge might exact from his clerk or a Squeers from his usher. If he were in business of his own, let him work never so hard, the spectre of ruin was continually dogging his footsteps. Even if, like Hudson the railway king, he soared to fabulous wealth, his fall might be equally sudden and sensational. The advance of trade was no steady progress, but proceeded by a series of violent convulsions. Hectic booms would alternate with panics, when bankruptcy among the masters was translated into unemployment among the hands, and misery stalked the land. There was no such thing in those days as limited liability. If a concern failed, all connected with it, even the shareholders, became liable for its debts. A far greater proportion of savings than at present was

invested in local banks, which not infrequently defaulted. What this might mean to some helpless widow, or maiden lady, who might wake up to find her little income vanished into thin air, is told in *Cranford*.

In the literature of the time we are continually being reminded of that grotesque limbo, the debtors' jail. It was to this that the losers in the struggle for survival were consigned, out of sight and mind, and to many of them Dante's inscription might well have applied—"All hope abandon, ye that enter here!" It was a system that cut both ways, for while it frequently doomed the honest but unfortunate to eke out an existence of hopeless misery, it allowed many a really fraudulent debtor to live securely within the "rules" and snap his fingers at his creditors.

The field was, in fact, set for such a struggle of all against all as certain ultra-Darwinians have imagined to be the order of the universe and the sole condition of progress. Business was in those days a more individual affair than it is now. Fortunes like those of the Peels were built up by real factory owners, and not by the paid representatives of shareholders. The master may have been a sweater or a tyrant, but he was really the master, with a body to kick and a soul to damn, and the difference between a good and a bad master was a vital one for the employés. It was by no means unknown for a master to stand in a relation almost paternal to those who toiled for him, but most of them were new men, without traditions, and themselves driven on, by stress of competition, to extract every penny, by almost any means. Humanity was among the many luxuries

that these stern and laborious men had to deny themselves. Business, with them, was emphatically business.

Among such a class, one can expect to find few of the amenities of life. It is highly improbable that courtesies were exchanged during the passage of the Beresina, and the roar of Cheapside must have drowned more "God Damns" than "By your leaves," on the part of colliding pedestrians. In the North and Midlands, the self-made capitalists spoke a language strange to genteel drawing-rooms, and their manners had by no means adjusted themselves to their incomes. What a small country town could be like, we can judge by Surtees's description of Handley Cross, the watering place to which Mr. John Jorrocks, that *épicier* Falstaff, was called to assume the duties of M.F.H. The humour of the description cannot detract from the unspeakable sordidness of the atmosphere, drunkenness, coarseness, and petty swindling being the only qualities that the observant Surtees seems capable of detecting in the mostly middle class society of the Spa. The natural end to a hunt dinner is a free fight; a presentation to a huntsman, who falls dead drunk on receiving it, takes the form of a watch previously stolen from his master; when the Master arrives late for a meet, the field amuse themselves by making the same huntsman drunk and incapable; the fashionable doctor of the Spa turns out to be an unctuous quack, without any degrees or qualifications; the hero himself is a gross-minded and foul-mouthed old ruffian, who cannot visit a country house, in the absence of its owner, without impersonating an expected guest and seducing the house-keeper—and his retort to the barber's wife, when she

remarked that "Old Fatty's been on his back," amateurs of Victorian propriety must look up for themselves.

But London had not yet ceased to be the spiritual as well as the commercial metropolis, and it is in London that the British bourgeois is seen in all his glory, as the cockney, a word that denotes something several degrees cruder than the subsequent "'Arry." The cockney was not only an English, but a European terror. He was primed with all the energy and self-confidence proper to a merciless struggle for survival, but as delicacy and culture had no survival value, he was almost wholly lacking in both. "He is the genius of labour," says Douglas Jerrold, "the willing slave to those worse than Egyptian taskmasters, '£. s. d.' . . . a creature expressly fashioned to toil for shillings, and for nothing more . . . His every thought, like every omnibus, runs to the Bank."

The cockney, then, was by no means lacking in good qualities of a sort, the qualities his age most prized. Like the rest of the great middle class, he was working, with heroic concentration of purpose, to make England the workshop of the world. It was only when he got away from the desk or the counter—and his chances of enjoying himself must have been scanty enough—that the blatantly aggressive side of his nature had scope. Unlike the office worker of to-day, he had no safety valve for his energies through the medium of organised games. The nearest he got to it was hiring a horse, which he had no idea of how to ride, thereby affording endless amusement to rude boys and cartoonists. On Blackheath, at Hampstead, at Sadler's Wells, on any open space easy of access on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, he

was seen in all his glory. He drank heavily. He delighted in knocking off hats, playing leapfrog, practical joking, and all the cruder forms of rowdiness. He was, particularly when in his cups, ready to use his fists on the slightest provocation. When middle age had somewhat damped his ardours, he preferred to spend his Sundays "in tavern bower or humble tea-garden," puffing his pipe and solemnly absorbing an immense quantity of very black brandy and water, after which he would return home, a little unsteadily, congratulating himself that Englishmen were very different from Papistical foreigners in their manner of honouring the Lord's day.

When he got abroad the middle class Englishman had the opportunity of impressing his English superiority on foreigners. His self-confidence increased with every mile he put between himself and his native shore. He would be aggressively manly—manliness being a monopoly of the English race—and as the bearer of a superior civilisation, he took an honest pride in flaunting his English ways and prejudices on all possible occasions. Albert Smith describes a fine specimen of his type in the Jack Johnson of his novel *Mr. Ledbury*, a sort of middle class Tom to Mr. Ledbury's Jerry. This gentleman, when he goes into Rouen Cathedral, amuses himself by blowing out the altar candles, and making faces at an aged female caretaker. In Paris, he purloins a lodging house placard and hangs it on an equestrian statue of Louis XIV. When he meets an elderly Englishwoman he starts quizzing her in a manner so brutally obvious as to arouse her indignant protest. He is, in short, what would nowadays pass for an unbelievable bounder, though in his

creator's eyes he is obviously all that can be desired of a jolly, manly young Englishman.

It is to the womenfolk that we must look for such of the amenities of life as could be preserved in the cockpit of Mammon that constituted British middle class society. But the hand of necessity was heavy on them too. Salaries were small, and even with the low wages that were paid to servants, the average middle class woman was either without, or with quite inadequate, domestic assistance, for the heavy housework that kept her nose to the grindstone. Housework was far heavier than it is in these labour-saving days. The home was usually its own laundry, its own jam and preserve factory. And the task of bearing and rearing children was exacted with a pious and pitiless rigour.

Small wonder then, if the wives and daughters of the bourgeoisie, with such scant leisure for broadening or improving their minds, became narrow, and stupid, and conventional. The wonder is that, labouring under such disadvantages, they were able to maintain such a standard of refinement as they did. For narrow as their ideas of good breeding necessarily were, they clung to them with an admirable determination. It was a fiction that was tacitly adopted in social intercourse, that a lady is exempt from the necessity of menial employment. Accordingly, when a caller arrived, all traces of work were hastily put away. If we may judge from one of the early *Punches*, the contrast between the smiling gentility of the evening party with the frantic labour of its preparation must have been astounding. But it is all to the credit of these much-enduring womenfolk that they did

manage to make their parlours and drawing-rooms sacrosanct from the grossness of masculine intercourse. These performed a similar function to that of the monasteries in the Dark Ages, little islands of civilisation, however primitive, in a sea of barbarism.

That smoking was considered ungentle in the presence of ladies, that contact between the drawing-room carpet and the sole of a boot violated a taboo, that gentlemen could be induced to patronise a dull ritual, as well as strong drink, on the Sabbath—these and similar conventions, however ridiculous in themselves, did at least impose a standard of conduct on the office worker or business man, that was not dictated by the necessity for filling his pockets and satisfying his carnal affections. It must not be forgotten that the desire to pose as ladies and gentlemen resulted in an imitation of upper-class manners which still, whatever their defects, were as yet of a much higher order than those of the middle class that was establishing its claim to rule the national roost.

Not all the results of the struggle for existence are to be entered on the debit side. If, on the one hand, it engendered grasping selfishness, and a contempt for all those things that cannot be appraised in terms of the currency, it did produce an independence and initiative, that after all are the first requisites of creative genius in any department of life. The struggle of every one against all the rest must needs—given the English temperament—foster a breed of mighty individuals; it provided the middle class with a vast store of personal energy seeking an outlet, energy that, however engendered, might find an outlet in other than merely economic channels.

And not the least important feature of the struggle was the fact that a small minority did actually succeed in coming by enough wealth to retire from the arena in affluence and comparative security. Such men were seldom of the stuff of which artists or thinkers are made—their energies had been too hopelessly specialised in one direction. But their children started with a clean sheet, and often a sufficient backing of capital to enable them to employ their inherited energy in any field, however unremunerative, that might happen to suit their talents. Such was the parentage of Ruskin and the Brownings, of Peel and Gladstone.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEITY

WHAT was the spiritual orientation of this class from which proceeded most of the leadership and creative energy at the opening of the Victorian age? We would say religion, but this word has become the property of the theologians, and our concern is with life. It is the weakness of theology that its basic terms, however hard we try to pin them down by definitions, are constantly and subtly changing their meaning, the most Protean of all being the central term, God. Most of us find our God in a mirror, not undistorted. And one true history of English Gods would form a more illuminating study than all the many of English kings at present on the market.

Certain it is that the God of eighteenth century theologians, like Bishops Butler and Berkeley, differed from the addressee of Victorian family prayers not less than Victoria herself differed from George II. A favourite Victorian text used to be: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." One of those urbane and excellent gentlemen, who officiated as bishops in the Walpole era, might have preferred to put it, "as for me and my class, we will postulate the moral governorship of the Deity." And the transition from upper to middle class supremacy coincides more or less with a theistic evolution of the Lord out of the Deity.

The intuition of the artist is sometimes more illuminating than whole volumes of exposition, and perhaps the most sincere rendering of eighteenth century religion was that of a German sculptor who, with the direct earnestness of his race, represented the Founder of Christianity in a wig. Such a figure must be admitted to have been more in harmony with the spirit of the age than that of a carpenter turned preacher, inciting what Burke would have called the swinish multitude against their betters, blaspheming wealth, and brimming over with that very quality most feared and despised by men of polite breeding—namely, enthusiasm. It was plainly indecent that embodied omnipotence should be allowed to appear in public with the naked locks of a clodhopper. If there were not a wigged Deity, it was necessary to create him.

The Church of England was not capable of going to these extremes of frankness, but the Deity of its worship was a very gentlemanly person, or partnership—for there was some little difficulty in deciding whether, and to what extent, He was to remain triune. He was to be sought, not with ardours of mysticism nor tears of repentance, but by a cautious balancing of analogies or calculation of advantages. And the type of character engendered by the Deity cult—though certainly more conformable to Pilate's standards than those of his Prisoner—is, at its best, by no means to be sneered at. The eighteenth century, in England, produced a good deal of solid and commonsense virtue. There were never two more amiable characters than the philosophic bishops, Butler and Berkeley, and surely few human beings more

loveable, and beloved, than Dr. Johnson. It was an age, for all its hardness, of active and increasing philanthropy. Had it been given to the ungentlemanly practice of looking its problems in the face, it might have claimed that its sober cult of the Deity was a decided improvement, for workaday purposes, on that of the Nazarene enthusiast. It was at least harmless.

But was it so harmless after all? Could so negative a faith harbour the germs of positive—even of mortal danger? Perhaps the very danger lay in the fact that the Deity was less of a *dieu fainéant* than might have appeared at first blush. If He had little of the fatherlike intimacy that comforted even in the Valley of the Shadow, or the dreadful malignancy that made torture by fire an act of faith, he was, as Bishop Butler described Him, the moral governor of the universe, and though, like that of a Hanoverian sovereign, His action was ill-defined, He did, to a certain extent, govern as well as reign.

Conformably to the political ideals of the time, this Deity was a thoroughly benevolent despot, though gifted with an unobtrusive tact that was sadly lacking in His earthly understudies. Instead of constantly interfering, He contented himself with gently tilting the scales in favour of virtue, and contrived so to manage things from behind the scenes that the cosmic drama swept forward, not without vicissitudes, towards a happy ending. Pope had announced His gospel by stating that whatever is right, and the great Doctor Pangloss, that Voltairean Coué, expanded it into the text that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Writers of fiction,

which was to all intents and purposes a new art, flew in the face of experience and morality by contriving—like so many deities harmonising their special creations—that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished. There had been a man in the land of Uz who could have taught them better. Philosophers, like Adam Smith, depicted the Deity as acting the part of a good general, whose strategy it is to contrive the maximum amount of happiness at any given time in His universe.

All of which might have been no worse than harmlessly silly, were it not that it might exercise a fatally paralysing influence on human effort. For a situation was rapidly developing in which civilised man would be faced with the task of overhauling his civilisation. Unless the Industrial Revolution were accompanied by a social and spiritual reconstruction, the result might be chaos or suicide. But if an omnipotent Deity happened to be so obliging as to take the supreme control of human affairs into His own hands, it was reasonable to suppose that He would guide matters to some desirable end, without any revolutionary effort on the part of His creatures. It is significant that the very Adam Smith, who was so certain of a divinely contrived moral harmony, was also the father of *laissez faire*, or the belief that no contrivance of statesmanship could achieve such beneficent results as might be trusted to emerge from a witch's brew of conflicting egotisms. Leave things alone and something—the phrase was to be that of a more splendid optimist even than Doctor Pangloss—would turn up. God's in His Heaven—or if not God, at least something equivalent—the moral government of the universe is in safe

hands, progress in human affairs, unlike that of rivers, is inevitably upwards, in short, whatever turns up is pretty sure to be right in the best of all possible worlds. Or as the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, one of the last survivors into the new age of the old eighteenth century school, used to say of any proposal to better human affairs by human action: "Why can't they leave it alone?"

But the Deity was an out and out eighteenth century product, and might have been expected to pass away with the aristocratic paganism of that age. And, indeed, the urbane moral governor does fade out of the picture. Not even a nineteenth century German would depict his God in a top hat—the contemporary equivalent of a wig. The Deity, as we shall see, was being forced to yield precedence to a more formidable potentate, the King Stork of the Universe, who preferred the title of Lord. But the Deity, if He usually went about incognito, was still a power to be reckoned with. His prophets were none the less influential, because many of them imagined they had ruled a God of any sort out of the universe.

Though the form might change, the function of the Deity remained constant. It was His method to eschew overt interference with the workings of nature or the order of society, but in some subtle and usually unexplained way, He did manage to harmonise and direct them, or, to put it in another way, He sat quietly on his throne to watch the great game played out between the powers of light and darkness, having previously queered the pitch against the Devil.

His names are legion. Sometimes, indeed, He retains

His old God title, as when, through the mouth of Tennyson, He foreshadows a far off divine event as the result of His activities; He is "a power not ourselves making for righteousness"; He is a "life force"; He is the spirit of progress, the world spirit, the Unknowable, Evolution, "an increasing purpose," but always with the same amiable capacity of contriving that

"somehow good
Shall be the final goal of ill."

Just in that "somehow" resides the whole essence, and danger, of the Deity cult. Somehow, sometime, something will in some way turn up, and Mr. Everyman Micawber will be justified in the far-off divine event.

Somehow. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

THE LORD

AT no time, even during the eighteenth century, did the Deity, as conceived of by Anglican bishops, have the field all to Himself. He was eminently a God for gentlemen and their dependents, and there were many outside the pale, who demanded something more intimate, or exciting, for the satisfaction of their pious instincts. Not so long ago Britain had owned the omnipotence of another, very different Being, a God of Hosts and Man of War—the Lord was His name. Not urbane was He, but a consuming fire to His enemies, not remote, in the cloud-land of analogy and speculation, but a very present help to His saints in trouble. Therefore He had gone forth before His armies and prevailed, so that England had served Him for fourteen years, until she could endure it no longer, and had risen in a frenzy of joy to put the saints under the milder yoke of the sinners.

After that, for a long time in England, very little was heard of this Lord of Sinai and Geneva in upper-class circles. Charles II, who had probably had ample time for reflection on the subject while yawning under the thunder of Scottish divines, had decided that Dissent was no religion for gentlemen. Accordingly the servants of the Lord were subjected, in their turn, to very considerable persecution, and thrived on it sufficiently to produce a *Paradise Lost* and a *Pilgrim's Progress*. For the Lord,

despite His social eclipse, was yet a force to be reckoned with, and even succeeded in returning a *quid pro quo* for the Clarendon Code by saddling the Church of England with a modified version of the Presbyterian Sabbath.

In the early eighteenth century, the cult of the Lord was about as strong in the mercantile and shopkeeping classes, as that of the Deity in the Court and country mansions. The Whig party, which ruled supreme under the first two Georges, drew a large part of its strength from the Dissenting interest. And, of course, in Calvinist Scotland the Kirk maintained her iron grip on the affection of the people, though with a certain slackening of zeal in the torture of old women. It is Dr. Watts, who flourished in the first half of the century, who forms the most visible, connecting link between the faith of the Ironsides and that of the Dissenting and Evangelical revival that reached its height at the opening of the Victorian Age. Dr. Watts's Lord was of a terrific and unrelenting sternness, and His Hell worthy of an age notable for the increased dimensions and heat of its blast furnaces. Through the medium of his hymns, the good Doctor made the divine name more terrible to successive generations of children than that of "Boney" was ever destined to become.

I used to have an old Victorian edition of this dreadful book, in which the illustrator had actually contrived to improve upon the spirit of the author. It was not enough for Dr. Watts to have written:

"'Tis dangerous to provoke a God!
His power and vengeance none can tell;

One stroke of his Almighty rod
Shall send young sinners quick to Hell.

Then 'twill forever be in vain
To cry for pardon or for grace . . ."

but the artist must needs emphasise the moral by a wood-cut of a tiny tombstone, "In Memory of Annie, aged 4," leaving one to imagine poor little Annie screaming now, and through all future ages, in the most exquisite tortures, and the Lord, whose unappeasable wrath is probably exacerbated by such importunity, ordering His agent, the Devil, to see if he can stoke up one or two degrees extra. It is significant that in the hymn on Heaven and Hell, three verses are principally concerned with the latter, as compared to one with the former:

"Can such a wretch as I
Escape this cursed end?"

a quotation to which the answer is obviously, as the Latin grammars say, expected in the negative. It is no wonder that in the unpublished autobiography of a Victorian clergyman, I find it recorded that his first remembered experience was that of being whipped by his earthly father for burning Dr. Watts's Hymns. It is a comfort to think that some children, at least, may have had the spirit to show that vengeance by fire is a game that two can play.

In the great Methodist revival, headed by the brothers Wesley, the worship of the Lord enters upon a new phase. It takes on a feminine element that the old Puritans had lacked. The believer no longer girds on his armour

against spiritual and temporal wickedness in high places; he runs, like a frightened child, to hide himself in his Mother's bosom. Being a Protestant, he dares not do this openly, the divine mother must take the form of a Saviour, even if that Saviour's name has to be feminised into "Jesu," and the grand old Hebrew battle songs supplemented by a steadily increasing collection of hymns.

In these the yearning to be mothered is a constantly recurring motive:

"Let me to Thy bosom fly," "Let me hide myself in Thee," or as the Anglican, Cowper (who elsewhere refers to "Jesu" as his husband) puts it:

"Can a woman's tender care
Cease towards the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee."

A marked cleavage now appears, between the entirely masculine Lord, and the partially feminine Saviour. For whatever lip homage it might be prudent to accord Him, the real emotion that the Lord aroused in His creatures was one of abject and unmitigated terror. Whitefield, the most eloquent preacher of the new movement, could throw audiences into convulsions by simply vociferating, "Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come!" For wrath, and that of the most malignant and implacable virulence, was the quality of the Lord that seems most to have impressed His evangelists. And to this perpetual explosiveness was added a hatred of any sort of joy or happiness on the part of His creatures, that did not directly arise out of His worship. Not only play or holidays

for children (which John Wesley would have absolutely denied the poor little wretches who fell into his power), not only such hideous practices as dancing, and theatre-going, but even the drinking of that Chinese decoction called tea, were discovered to be sinful.

It was natural that the worshippers of the Lord, within or without the Anglican fold, should have been chary of expressing their real feelings about that formidable personage. Even Mr. Squeers had been able to raise a cheer from his trembling pupils on his return to Dotheboys Hall, and the expressions of love for a Being who was able instantly to consign any defaulter to eternal torment, must be taken for what they are worth.* Fear is the sentiment more often associated with Him, and though it is usually qualified by the explanation that it only means respect, it is pretty evident that it means fear, pure and simple. How could it possibly be otherwise, when for all their lip homage, His ministers are never tired of saddling the Lord with the most diabolical attributes? The Rev. William Romaine, writing after the fearful earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, treats it as a kind of divine practical joke.

"They did not imagine that God was going to destroy them that morning . . . while they were speaking peace, peace unto themselves, they were called and hurried in a moment to judgment. . . . One with an oath in his mouth was calling for damnation on his soul and it came,

* With the passing of the old militant Puritanism, the God of Battles, who went before the armies of his elect and scattered their enemies, ceases to be in demand—one of his last appearances is in Dr. Watts's magnificent hymn—the free translation of a psalm: "O God our help in ages past!"

while the words were in his mouth, and down he sunk into the pit of Hell."

But the simple evangelist, in his desire to make the most of this feat of Omnipotence, incautiously contrives to give away the real state of the case as between the Lord and His creatures. "Careless sinners," he says, "may flatter themselves with their notions of safety but . . . while the Almighty is their enemy they can have no peace." Here we have the Lord in His true colours as the sinners' enemy, in direct opposition to the sinners' friend, as represented by "Jesu." And we must remember that by Romaine's account, and that of his fellow evangelists, to say sinner is practically to say man. "This is our condition," he cries from the pulpit, "we are all unrighteous: and we are without strength to attain any righteousness of our own." The Lord, it would seem to follow from these premises, is therefore to be viewed as the supreme enemy of mankind, supreme because the Devil obviously functions only as His minister, "a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." *Qui facit per alium, facit per se.*

Therefore the salvation that the Lord's evangelists proclaim is that of mankind from the wrath, or vindictiveness, of the Saviour's Father, a wrath rendered universal and unappeasable by a crime committed when only two members of the doomed race were alive, and a vindictiveness characterised, with unconscious humour, as just. So illogical is human nature, that this inhuman theory was capable of inciting to humane conduct. Most of the leading evangelists were men of exemplary, if singularly narrow and colourless lives. Their influence was always

exerted in the direction of kindness to the poor and freedom to the slave, and they did much towards softening the brutality of English life, during and after the polite century. It was to the Son, rather than to the Father, that they looked for their exemplar, but none the less, the Paternal wrath and enmity to joy cast a hardening and depressing influence over the Victorian Age.

But the chief effect of this latest version of the Protestant faith was to revive and intensify the concentrated moral earnestness that was the heritage of Puritanism. It was this quality that had made such a peculiar appeal to the men of trade and business among whom the strength of Puritanism lay.* To mortify the flesh and renounce all earthly joys may or may not have been the best way of getting to heaven, but it was a most efficient discipline for those who wanted to get on in the service of Mammon. Those hard-faced hustlers in whiskers, who swirled down Cheapside and God-damned poor Heine out of their way, had probably, most of them, worked their apprenticeship in the service of a jealous God and learnt to sharpen their energies to one fine point of individual salvation, whether from Hell in the next world or the Fleet Prison in this.

During the century following the first Wesleyan revival, the Lord's sphere of influence was continually expanding. Certainly He never ceased to be in essence—what He had started by being almost exclusively—a

* But the connection between Puritanism and capitalism has, I think, been made too much of in recent years. The enclosure of the commons, after all, was by a class the very reverse of Puritan.

middle-class product. But the Wesleys had made their most moving appeal to the lowest of the populace—in fact the more simple and less educated the audience, the more likely it was to be carried away by such direct appeals to the emotions as those of Whitefield. A more striking triumph was the capture of the upper class, or a preponderant part of it, by the Evangelical movement that was the counterpart of Methodism in the Church of England. This was largely due to panic caused by the spectacle of the French Revolution. Infidelity, which had formerly been quite *à la mode* in fashionable circles, was now displayed as the moving spirit of Jacobinism. Priests and aristocrats went in the same tumbrils to the guillotine, the same hands that had fired the châteaux, profaned the Host, and rent the seamless vesture of the Chartres Madonna. Religion became a matter of social as well as individual salvation. Rich gentlemen like Wilberforce began to abase themselves before the Lord and fly to the Saviour's bosom. The wives of the enclosers of commons blossomed into Lady Bountifuls. Earnest young parsons, of the type of Edmund Bertram, of Mansfield Park, began to discover other possible fields of activity than the hunting of foxes and the reading of an occasional sermon. Family pews began to fill up at service time. And the servants were subjected to the anti-democratic inoculation of daily family prayers.

Even that shrewdest of observers, Charles II, had been proved wrong in this event. Puritanism with its claws out, had become a religion fit for gentlemen. The Lord was no longer a God of Battles, except in the sense that war—as Romaine explicitly points out—was, like the

plague, one of His devices for pursuing His vendetta against the House of Adam.* Out of the dawn mists by the sea at Dunbar, the Ironside squadrons had called on Him, not in vain, to arise and scatter their enemies. But the message of the Wesleyans and Evangelicals was that it is better to endure all things in this world, in the hope of that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart understood. The Red Flag and Internationale might arise in the future from the throats of the proletariat, but not the old psalm bidding God to arise and let the bosses be scattered.

Dr. Watts, who passed the last 26 years of his life as pensioner in the luxurious home of Sir Thomas and Lady Abney, set the social tone of the new Puritanism with his comforting assurance,

“Though I am but poor and mean,
I will move the rich to love me,
If I’m modest, neat and clean,
And submit when they reprove me.”

and the conclusion of the whole matter was that of the Victorian hymn:

“The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.”

* “My Christian Brother—God has declared that when a land has sinned against him by trespassing grievously, then he will stretch out his hand upon it, and visit it with his four sore judgments—the sword, the famine, the noisome beast and the pestilence. These he sends to punish the land for its grievous trespasses.” Romaine, *Works*, p. 866.

By the time of the Reform Bill, the old, urbane, remote Deity had gone quite out of favour as an object of ostensible worship, though as an unacknowledged influence He was very much alive. The triumph of the Lord was complete, and coincided more or less, as might have been expected, with the triumph of His own bourgeoisie in whose image He had been made. Wesleyanism had become quite humdrum and conventional, and even the Evangelicals, now that so many of them were in fat livings, had lost some of their first, proselytising enthusiasm, and were becoming, as Dean Church assures us, on quite good terms with the world. Charles Dickens was shortly to express the normal person's dislike of the petty non-conforming "shepherd," in the same spirit as Chaucer had pilloried the begging Franciscans of his own time. The "Sims," or followers of Charles Simeon at Cambridge, were, for long after their founder's death, to focus upon themselves the dislike that even Victorian undergraduates, in the mass, were capable of evincing for aggressive piety in their own ranks. But such reactions were not in the nature of persecution, but rather the sporadic and ineffectual protests of

"Those who were bored
With praising the Lord"

against a social tyranny that no one seriously dreamed of defying.

If we want to know what the cult of the Lord meant for the generation that was to form the manhood and womanhood of the early Victorian Age, we can sample the literature that was forming its character during the

years of childhood. As a type of its lighter manifestations, take Mrs. Turner's *Cautionary Stories*, which, though prim and priggish to the last degree, are so naïve, as to be quite delightful. Who could quarrel with the Mother who, when asked by some toddling Jacobin the pertinent question why all the choicest pleasures of the table are monopolised by the grown-ups, replies,

"Because, my dear, it is not right
To spoil the youthful appetite."

but we realise the strength of Puritan austerity, when we find even kindly Mrs. Turner commenting on the incident of a tiny boy, who steals a ride on a pony, and, of course is lamed for life, with,

"Who shall pity? Who's to blame?"

Who indeed, when a just and loving Father would have thought nothing of torturing him eternally for less than that? We remember "Annie, aged 4."

But if we want to realise the spiritual pabulum on which the Victorians were reared, we should do best of all to study Mrs. Sherwood's once famous *Fairchild Family*, a book that ran into fourteen editions between its appearance in 1818, and that of a second part in 1842. Most upper and middle class children must have been subjected to its influence, either directly, or through imitations, during this time. The fact that they were not rendered nervous wrecks for life speaks a lot for the toughness of our great-grandparents' constitutions.

Mr. Fairchild, the paterfamilias of this book, after the genial manner of parents at that time, not only models

himself on the Lord, but actually borrows the divine attributes so far as his own family is concerned. That this is no exaggeration will be evident from the title of one of the chapters:

“Second story of the Misery of those who are under the Anger of God. Exemplified by the unhappiness of a Child under the Anger of his Father.”

Mr. Fairchild is perfectly explicit on the subject. Henry, aged six, has played with a hare instead of learning Latin grammar, he has even had the unheard-of temerity to say that he does not want to learn Latin.

“But it is my pleasure that you should,” thunders Mr. Fairchild, and then rising to the height of his divine majesty:

“I stand in the place of God to you whilst you are a child . . . therefore if you cast aside my authority and will not obey me, I shall not treat you as I do my other children. From this time forward, Henry, I have nothing to do with you: I will speak to you no more, neither will your mamma, or sister, or John, or Betty. Betty will be allowed to give you bread to eat and water to drink: and I shall not hinder you from going to your own bed to sleep at night; but I will have nothing more to do with you: so go out of my study immediately.”

No wonder the poor infant, who has already been held by the manservant while his father flogs him with a horse-whip, “looked surprised and frightened” at this harangue, but Mr. Fairchild is not the man to permit his programme of divine vengeance to be thrown out of gear by an inopportune repentance. Forgetting apparently, that it is Henry who has been ordered out of the study, “Mr. Fair-

child walked away with a terrible look," to arrange the boycott with the servants and other children, leaving Henry "wishing he had not been so obstinate." He has good reason to wish it during the next two days, during which the work of starving and terrifying him into submission is carried on with a thoroughness that under present day conditions would certainly lead to Mr. Fairchild being boycotted himself, if not prosecuted by the R.S.P.C.C.

But Mr. Fairchild is capable of surpassing even this performance. On one occasion, in the course of eaves-dropping outside the parlour door, he hears a somewhat heated dispute about the use of a doll. The mills of parental wrath are at once put into motion. First of all the children's hands are impartially whipped, till, as the authoress records with sadistic glee, "they smarted again." Next they are deprived of all food during the morning, stood in the corner, treated to extracts from Dr. Watts's hymns, "and what was worse, their papa and mamma looked very gravely at them." But Mr. Fairchild has not yet shot his bolt. That afternoon he forces them all to accompany him to a gloomy wood, in which stands a gibbet, and "the face of the corpse was shocking." While Mr. Fairchild is just warming to the improving theme of hanging, and its varieties, "the wind blew and shook the body on the gibbet, rattling the chains," and the terrified children implore to be taken away. But Mr. Fairchild is not to be moved. Instead, he assembles them beneath the gibbet, nor will he let them go till he has delivered a long account of the murder, drawn the appropriate moral, and flopped down on the grass to deliver a prayer to his God,

whom it is our nature to hate, as Mr. Fairchild somewhat naïvely admits, beseeching Him for brotherly love, "and above all, make us love our dear father and mother, and everybody who teaches us any good thing."

We must be just to Mr. Fairchild. Though he may perhaps pass for the most detestable character in all fiction—his most obvious competitor, Squeers, being a less nauseating humbug, and displaying a certain affection for his own offspring—he falls far short of the Lord, whose attributes he assumes, as a tormentor of children. Mr. Fairchild is capable of relenting after a couple of days, and even he would hardly have tortured Henry, aged 6, for an hour, as "Annie, aged 4," was and is presumably roasted alive to all eternity. And perhaps many of the parents who ostensibly modelled their family discipline on Fairchild lines, mollified it a bit when it came to practice. But one can understand the atmosphere in which the future Victorians grew up, when we realise that for so many of them, during their most impressionable years, the Lord was above, and papa, if not listening at the door, somewhere below, and lower still, a not improbable Hell.

CHAPTER IX

HAPPINESS BY THE UNIT

FROM what we have seen of the middle class, in its faith and works, we might be led to expect that its triumph, borne to power as it was on the crest of the Industrial Revolution, would have been one of hopeless materialism. In the later twenties, the Muses seemed to be on the point of forsaking England. The period between the death of Byron, and the rise of the first Victorian giants, is one of no great achievement or obvious promise in the realms of literature, nor did the other arts seem likely to survive the substitution of the new earnestness for the old lightness of touch. In religion, between the cooling of the first Evangelical fervour and the coming of the Tractarians, there is a similar tale to tell; while in statesmanship, except for the uninspiring figure of Peel, there arise no equal successors to the men formed in the school of Pitt and Fox.

The slate is, in fact, being wiped clean of the old aristocratic culture, and after a pause, the new lords of civilisation will scrawl it over with whatever is in their souls to express. Dominating these years of transition is the urge to get on at all costs, to accumulate, every man for himself, as much happiness as possible, and, as a means to happiness, money. The middle class was beginning to add a philosophy to its religion, nor was there so much

difference between the two as might have appeared on the surface.

There was a sprightly and rather loveable old gentleman, as active as ever in spite of his fourscore years, who adored pigs and mice and all four-footed things, who christened his teapot "Dick," and might be seen trotting about at stated times with the stick he called Dapple, and this old gentleman had got a reputation, not only English but world-wide, of being the more than philosopher, who had swept the cobwebs of old-fashioned metaphysics into the dustbin, and was now offering mankind a simple panacea for all its ills, called "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." The old gentleman's name was Jeremy Bentham, and you can see all there is left of him, embalmed in his habit as he lived, by getting leave from the authorities of University College.

The previous century had been one, pre-eminently, of mathematical solutions. It was dominated by the prestige of Newton. In the calculus a key had been found to unlock the mysteries of the heavens. Why not have another calculus to solve social problems? Give Archimedes a fulcrum, and he would lift the world. Give your social reformer a unit, and the adjustment of life to environment would be a matter of simple calculation. What better unit could you have than a given quantity of the thing called happiness? So at least thought old Mr. Bentham. He was perfectly convinced that it was only the quantity of happiness that counted. Any fool could tell how many joys made five. The happiness to be derived from a game called push-pin, and that to be

derived from poetry, were of exactly equal value, per unit, for purposes of calculation. After this, we shall not be surprised to hear that Bentham's notion of poetry was as simple as his notion of happiness:

"Prose is when all the lines except the last go on to the margin. Poetry is when some of them fall short of it."

We cannot help suspecting that the old gentleman would have accumulated considerably more units of his favourite commodity in the course of a sternly contested bout of push-pin, than during a reading of the *Epipsy-chidion*.

Only such a man as Bentham, who must have had any germ of humour effectually sterilised by devouring Rapin's history, in the original, at the age of three, could not only have taken his wonderful calculus perfectly seriously, but spent a long and voluminous lifetime in working it out to the most insignificant detail. In compensation for his lost childhood, Bentham remained something of a big, loveable baby to his life's end. Even in his old age, he tried to tame mice in a room haunted by cats. In a similar spirit he had spent a great part of his energies, and much of his private fortune, on a scheme for a new kind of prison in which, he confidently believed, you could turn criminals into respectable citizens as easily as, in modern Chicago, you turn pigs into sausages. He was also ready to supply a detailed constitution, at short notice, to any nation that happened to want one. And he actually found takers!

I suppose that, except in academic circles, where anything bearing so portentous a name as utilitarianism is

assured of the respect its syllables demand, there is nobody nowadays incapable of seeing the absurdity of treating your happiness, and mine, and every one else's, as if they could all be valued, and tabulated, and assessed like so many incomes. Hard-headed was the epithet that used to be applied to the disciples of Bentham. If we were to judge them by their philosophy alone, we should be tempted to substitute "muddle-headed."

But it is never safe to take any philosophy or religion at its face value. The fact that it is no more possible to make a calculus of happiness than it is to fill your cellar with bottled moonshine, is no reason for laughing the utilitarian case out of court. What Bentham and his followers most wanted to do was to cut every sort of cackle, and get on with the business of reforming society from the base upwards. That they should have cackled interminably themselves about their greatest happiness principle, is only human. And certainly few Englishmen will be found to regret that they confined themselves to this comparatively harmless form of eyewash, instead of borrowing a few leaves out of contemporary German books of philosophy, finding thereby that Being is identical with Not-Being and that the result of both is Becoming, or that everything is profoundly for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds.

It was something that the middle class, that was now to have its chance of controlling the nation's destinies, should have produced a group of thinkers with a definite policy of social reconstruction. The Benthamites were nothing if not courageous. If their first principles were not too clearly thought out, they knew exactly what they

wanted in practice. They would make a clean sweep of the past, with its worships and traditions. Nothing—not even the sacred Constitution, much less what Burke had called the decent drapery of life—should stand in the way of a brand new order of society, in which everything should be ordered by reason, and the output of happiness be multiplied like that of Lancashire cotton goods.

But men who have only half thought out their conscious faith, may chance to be impelled by motives that lie beneath the surface. The greatest happiness principle might mean anything or nothing—what the utilitarians meant was that the old governing class had muddled on long enough, and that it was time for the bourgeoisie to substitute its own solid virtues and go-ahead energy for the leisured elegance of the past. Perukes and swords had had their day, tall hats and chimneys—the taller and blacker the better—were to symbolise the new civilisation.

In all this, the difference between the followers of Bentham and those of the Lord was less one of faith than of temperament. Both would have heartily concurred in Dr. Watts's scorn of the sluggard, who

“told me his dreams.”

Both had the same contempt for vanities, and it is unlikely that an Evangelical Recording Angel would have distinguished more nicely than Bentham between the merits of poetry (exclusive of hymns) and those of push-pin. In spite of their talk of happiness, the utilitarians were the last people to make an art of its pursuit. They were as plain living and hard working as the most devout

of the elect. And they were possessed of the same grim and unsmiling earnestness of moral purpose.

They had even, among their leaders, a very colourable imitation of Mr. Fairchild, in the shape of James Mill, the son of a Forfarshire shoemaker, trained for the ministry, and combining all the aggressive self-confidence of the self-made Lowlander with the spiritual pride of a Calvinist Holy Willy. A not unsympathetic biographer, Sir Leslie Stephen, describes him as "a curious example of a man who, while resolutely discharging every duty, somehow made even his virtues unamiable." His standard of morals is described by his even more famous son, John Stuart, as utilitarian, "taking as the exclusive test of right and wrong, the tendency of actions to produce pleasure or pain. But," adds John Stuart, "he had . . . scarcely any belief in pleasure. . . . He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by."

Like Mr. Fairchild, James Mill must needs undertake the education of his children. His modest purpose, as regards his firstborn, was defined in a letter to Bentham, as being "to leave a successor worthy of both of us." He probably did not realise how truly he was working to this end when he subjected the poor little fellow to a course of intensive cram, beginning with long lists of Greek words at the age of three, and including, at the mature age of seven, Herodotus, Xenophon, Diogenes Laërtius, part—only part!—of Lucian, and Isocrates *Ad Demonium* and *Ad Nicoclem*, not to speak of six dialogues of Plato, including the *Theætetus*, "which last dialogue," reflects John Stuart in his old age, "I venture to think,

would have been better omitted, as it was totally impossible I should understand it."

Mr. Mill must be admitted to have fallen a good deal short of Mr. Fairchild as a child-queller, though his children, with the exception of the eldest, certainly seem to have suffered in health under his ministrations, and Mr. Fairchild could hardly have improved upon Mr. Mill's precedent of starving^{the} children, as he did one day, till six o'clock in the evening, because John, aged eight, in teaching his little sisters, had passed their work as correct when there had been a fault of one word. A visitor remarks of Mill that "no fault, however trivial, escapes his notice; none goes without reprehension or punishment of some kind," and the children are heard to cry when scolded or cuffed over their lessons. Like Wesley, Mill would never hear of holidays, for fear of encouraging habits of idleness. But he was incapable of keeping to such an heroic level of brutality as the hero of Mrs. Sherwood. His principal terrors were a cutting tongue and an uncontrollable temper. But he frankly disbelieved in the Lord, and hated the idea of Him, and therefore had not the example to follow nor the attributes to assume of that Father of Jealousy.

The uncompromising earnestness and drab virtues of the English middle-class were thus common to its utilitarian intelligentsia and its Lord-fearing rank and file. But the utilitarians had nothing corresponding to Jesu worship. It answered to no need in their temperaments. Such a contented old bachelor as Jeremy Bentham had probably never felt an acute need of flying to any one's bosom, and as for James Mill, we have the word of his son, that "for

passionate emotions of all sorts, and everything that has been said or written in exaltation of them, he professed the greatest contempt. He regarded them as a form of madness." Neither conviction of sin nor the peace that passeth all understanding could possibly find an entrance into the experience of such men. They were what William James would have described as *once-born*. Happiness, as they conceived of it, was a very plain-sailing affair.

It is not, therefore, greatly to be wondered at, that the calculus of happiness should have tended to develop, in practice, into a calculus of egotism. In spite of an enormous amount of verbiage about such things as eulogistic, dyslogistic and neutral qualities, the followers of Bentham had hardly the faintest notion of any science of psychology, beyond what analytical cobwebs could be spun out of their own brains. But if Experience finds the front door closed against her, she will usually contrive to enter unperceived by the back. The class from which the utilitarians had sprung consisted mainly of individuals engaged in a merciless economic struggle of all against all. It was not, therefore, altogether to be wondered at, that they should have tended to simplify their study of social problems by proceeding upon the assumption that men, in the mass, were so many jarring atoms of selfishness. That assumption was never nearer the truth than among the English middle class at the opening of the Victorian era.

It was upon such a basis that a number of theorists built up the system of political economy which was known as classical and held sway during the period of middle-class

rule. Its tendency was to accept the struggle for survival as a good thing in itself, and to allow every individual the utmost possible freedom to pursue its own interests, in the faith that all things would work together for good—or at any rate for the best attainable—to those who loved the main chance. No doubt these economists were not quite such inhuman doctrinaires as they were sometimes painted, but that they well earned their unpopularity among every class but their own can hardly be denied. To the wage-earners, they represented that any attempt to better their condition at the expense of their employers was foredoomed to failure, because such action could never increase the fund of capital out of which wages are paid. As against the landowners, a Jewish banker called Ricardo first propounded a theory whose revolutionary implications he and his fellow economists quite failed to realise. They put in a separate category the form of unearned increment that comes from the rent of land, and thus contrived to pillory the landlord as the villain in the social drama, who sits still and batters on the labour of the community. It only needed another even more logical Jew, with a different class bias, to prove that exactly the same case can be made against any kind of capitalist whatsoever. Where Ricardo had planted, Karl Marx watered, and Lenin garnered the increase.

And no doubt it was the accumulation of capital that had made the Industrial Revolution possible, and its continued accumulation that determined the rate of mechanical progress. Those who held the mystic faith—rapidly spreading from the middle class to the rest of the community—that such progress must be a good thing in itself,

would naturally want to see everything done to encourage the capitalist. But was that progress so very good after all? A friend of Ricardo, himself one of the new economists, Parson Malthus, touched upon an even more momentous issue than that of capital and its function in the social system, by claiming that multiplication of wealth is more than counterbalanced by the multiplication of men. Population, he discovered, is continually pressing upon the means of subsistence, and unless the human species can find means of limiting its own increase, it is doomed—no matter what its mechanical achievements—to the perpetual predicament of having more mouths to feed than meals to go round. The hope of a better time coming is therefore a mirage—the poor and the wage slave ye have with you always. This worthy minister of Christ would even abolish the poor law, and leave the helpless veteran and superfluous infant to find charity or die in the nearest ditch. He is a little perturbed, though, at the thought of charity. Unless “the hand of benevolence” is restrained, idleness and improvidence will thrive.

If Malthus had been less ambitious, and confined himself to his own time and country, his law of population would have been more nearly valid. The most important fact about the Industrial Revolution in England was that every year the population was more and more outrunning any means of subsistence that the island could furnish. At the beginning of George III's reign it could have lived fairly comfortably, if it had been cut off from the world. During the nineteenth century, a steadily increasing proportion of Englishmen was becoming absolutely

dependent on what they could induce the foreigner to send them in exchange for their goods. There could no longer be any question of retarding the new tempo of life—they must produce or starve. They had staked their life on maintaining the industrial lead that had made them the workshop of the world. Future generations might find that lead slipping away.

Somewhere in his essays, Jerome K. Jerome has a story of a mechanical dancing partner, with which a certain lady was highly delighted, until something went wrong with the works, and the thing started careering round the room, clutching her in its embrace, blandly repeating its stock of ballroom platitudes, and dashing out her life against the walls.

This was a nightmare, and the hard-headed fraternity were less given to dreaming nightmares than to realising them. Mr. Bumble's workhouse was solid and conspicuous, to the extent of ruining the landscape. So were the new towns. Facts—as Mr. Bounderby, and Carlyle, used to say—and no dreams at all.

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CHAPTER X

ROMANCE

IF the hard-headed Benthamites and Puritan Killjoys had entirely dominated the middle-class mind at the time of the Reform Bill, we should have expected the Victorian Age to have been the most colourless and unspiritual in our history, instead of the heyday it was of idealism and imaginative genius. No doubt Puritan discipline, under the auspices of the Lord and Mr. Fairchild, fostered the concentration that is the element most needful to any work of permanent value. The utilitarians may have played a part in stimulating the aggressive individualism that renders the Victorians, with all their faults, so intensely interesting. But for the colour and sweetness of that age we are indebted neither to its philosophy nor its religion, but to that deliberate stimulation of the emotions that is summed up in the term "romance."

The Romantic Movement—so far as it can be said to have had a beginning at all—was quite a century old at the opening of the Victorian Age. Indeed, there was no time when romance in England had been quite dead. Dick Steele might have passed for a typical romantic in real life, just as Sir Roger de Coverley was a thoroughly romantic rendering of the old English squire. During the time of the most enormous wigs and stiffest brocades, Chaucer was honoured and edited, Shakespeare's influence was undiminished, Milton and Spenser were not

without honour. Our national temperament has ever fought shy of extremes. Even our own age of jazz and disillusionment can find a place in its heart for Walter de la Mare.

And just as the English Augustan age was never half as correct and formal as that of Louis XIV so the emotional reaction against all that correctness and formality never ran to the extremes it did abroad. The high-souled ladies who were ready, on the slightest excuse, to immolate duty, honour, and the marriage vow, on the altar of love's young dream, were never so common, or at any rate so open about it, in England, as they were at the height of the romantic moontide on the Continent. England never had any outburst of literary anarchy corresponding to the *Sturm und Drang* in Germany, nor was the English stage capable of rising to such a curtain as when the hero of Goethe's *Stella*, and two heroines, mingle in one triple and sublime embrace!

John Wesley is the figure most nearly corresponding to that of Rousseau in eighteenth century England, and as an emotional revivalist, his influence in the long run was perhaps as great. And yet, as the immortal old lady might have said on reading *The Confessions*, "How different from the family life of dear Mr. Wesley!" Certainly the latter was much more respectable. But if our old lady, being better informed on the subject than so pious an old lady was likely to be, had realised that the Evangelist's rich widow, unlike Rousseau's penniless slut (both were ex-servant girls), had been so little appreciative of her consort's virtues as to leave him, then she might have substituted the eminently safe name of Mr.

Wordsworth. Even in *The Prelude*, that most intimate revelation of a poet's soul, there is no revelation of the poet's French daughter.

It was only when it penetrated the upper ranks of English society that the Emotional Revival blossomed into anything like the extravagance of its Continental manifestations. There is, indeed, a delightful story about Blake and his wife having been discovered naked in a summerhouse, and blandly explaining that they were Adam and Eve. But the latest biographers have vindicated the poet's decency, and it would ill-become us to question so proper a verdict. But there is unhappily no doubt that the son of Sir Timothy Shelley did make a rather embarrassed passage, nude and dripping from a bathe in the Mediterranean, through a room where a mixed party of guests was dining.* And as for Lord Byron, not even the hardest biographer has undertaken more than a very partial vindication of his respectability.

Extravagance was the very hallmark of upper-class Romanticism, in the days when that class still governed the country and could do what it would in the face of all the world. Lord Frederick North, who displayed his love for Greece by calling himself Plato and going about in classical garb, was only a Regency dandy transplanted. Beau Brummell and Jack Mytton were, each in his chosen sphere, magnificent eccentrics, though Mytton displays the tendency of upper-class extravagance to degenerate into the merely physical. The expression "drunk as a lord" probably dates from the time when a lord was no

* By Trelawney's account Shelley's embarrassment does not appear to have been due so much to his nakedness as to his dislike of meeting company under any circumstances.

more ashamed of flaunting his drunkenness than the Son of Jesse.

The death of Byron may be said to mark, as nearly as possible, the end of the second phase of romantic ardour in England, a phase whose character was largely determined by the influence of, or reaction against, the French Revolution. And this phase, in its ideals, if not altogether in its personnel, was mainly aristocratic. The two outstanding figures—whose influence played no unimportant part in shaping the destinies and culture of Europe—were those of Byron and Scott, and Scott, who claimed descent from a line of Border lairds, was a thorough aristocrat in spirit—a fact that proved his eventual ruin. The Lake Poets, who started as revolutionaries, were caught by a wave of patriotic reaction, and, as Byron put it, “turned out Tory at last.” Landor, if a democrat by profession, was more of a Roman senator in spirit. Keats, indeed, was not only a Liberal but a tradesman, a fact which *Blackwood* made the excuse for doing its gentlemanly best to hound him into the grave. And the long neglect from which Blake suffered may be partly due to the fact that he—far more than any of his poetic English contemporaries—was robustly and unashamedly middle class, without any veneer of gentility whatsoever.

After a period of transition, during which the romantic impulse seemed to have exhausted itself, there was another great emotional quickening at the beginning of the thirties, and this time romance may fairly be said to have swept the country. It had ceased to be on the defensive—the high and dry critics of the eighteenth century tradition were no longer lying in wait to bludgeon out any

sparks of sensibility. Sense, as Miss Austen would have called it, was quite out of fashion.

But now it was the middle class that took up the running. The year 1830 was one not only of political but of spiritual revolution. It was in Paris that the fire was kindled, a Paris taught by experience, and determined to show that even revolution might be conducted on lines unexceptionally bourgeois. The political revolution threw up the least kingly of all the sons of Saint Louis, whose appearance was suggestive of Fagin, and whose habits were deliberately and ostentatiously those of the prosperous bourgeois. Much more inspiring was the other, spiritual revolution whose leaders were men like de Musset and Victor Hugo, and whose battle was fought not in the streets, but in the theatre, where *Hernani* was being performed before audiences of romantics, jubilant to the point of hysteria, and of conservatives disgruntled to that almost of murder.

The English do not push their art, or their politics, to quite these stormy extremes. But they too had their bourgeois revolution, closely following on, and partly stimulated by, that across the Channel, and with them, too, there was a spiritual revolution, less sudden and dramatic, but scarcely less important than its French counterpart. In both countries it was the middle class taking romance to its own bosom and wedding it to its own ideals. In France, the new sensibility had been enlisted on the side of royalty and the Church, until 1830, when it deserted to Liberalism. In England the emotional overflow was guided into safe channels by Puritan-Evangelical discipline. The typical romantic could now, with Pomponius

Ego, say of himself, that he "never in his moments of deepest hilarity forgot what was due to beauty and moral worth."

How then are we to define the Romantic movement? Romance has no philosophy or dogma by which it may be known. A Wesley and a Rousseau, a Wordsworth and a Byron, may blossom on its stem. It may equally thrive amid the gallantries of Montmartre and the eloquence of Oxford pulpits. Its spirit flies to the pomp and chivalry of a highly recoloured Middle Ages, but returns to a bowl of punch in the company of Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Jingle.

Romance is, in fact, an attitude of soul. To put it psychologically, it is a way of reacting to impressions. The old, aristocratic, eighteenth century ideal had been that a man should be so completely the master of his impressions as to receive and classify them without any overmastering desire to translate them into action. In a different sense from that of the Psalmist, his prayer was that he should never be moved. He ordered his conduct by an elaborate ceremonial, because he did not wish to have it dictated by the mood of the moment. He had a polite smile for everything. Louis XV, when he saw the funeral cortege of his Pompadour, merely remarked that madame had a wet day for her journey. Even piety was only acceptable—as more than one epitaph testifies—if it was without enthusiasm. As for virtue, the highest praise is that recorded on a tablet in Bristol Cathedral,

"No spot of vice his polished manners stained."

The eighteenth century was artificial, not because, as Carlyle said, it was a swindler century, but because it

deliberately aimed at making of the human spirit a well-ordered sanctuary, against whose walls the storm of impressions from the outer world might beat in vain.

To the romantic, such an attitude was unnatural, inhuman, moribund. He wished to be stimulated to action by every impression that came to him. The purest romantic of all, Blake, illustrated this responsiveness in a series of such terrific couplets as,

“Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain doth tear.”

and

• “The soldier, armed with sword and gun
Palsied strikes the summer sun.”

and—to sum up the whole matter in two lines:

“Can I see another’s woe,
And not be in sorrow too?”

or, as Coleridge has it,

“He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small.”

As the movement gathers strength, the romantics begin to turn, with furious contempt, upon the urbane detachment of the past. A man justified by the traditions of Versailles or the precepts of Lord Chesterfield, would be to Wordsworth,

“One who would peep and botanise,
Upon his mother’s grave.”

and as for the Butlers and Berkeleys, the Humes and Gibbons, we have the verdict of Keats:

“Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow.”

It was with that ill-fated trio, Byron, Keats and Shelley, that the reaction of impressions became most intense even to the point of violence. Shelley was constantly panting, shrieking, dissolving, weeping, expiring, while the transports of Keats’ desire for the “mercy—pity—love!—aye, love!” of that rather coarse-grained young woman, Fanny Brawne—with love’s appurtenances of shape, hands, eyes, kiss, soul, and “warm, white, lucent million-pleasured breast”—are so unrestrained as to amount almost to raving. But this very unrestraint was crowned by a glory of concentrated passion scarcely to be equalled, of its kind, in the whole of literature; such lines as,

“As on the jag of a mountain crag
Which an earthquake rocks and swings,
An eagle alit one moment may sit
In the light of its golden wings,”

or Byron’s throne-shaking defiance

“of every despotism in every nation.”

Such intensity of emotion was too great for flesh and blood to house. It is by no caprice of destiny that such

spirits should burn themselves out in youth. Who could conceive of an old Shelley?

The difference between the Victorian and the pre-Victorian conceptions of romance is hinted at by the fact that one finds it a little difficult, mentally, to deprive Tennyson of his beard and laurels, and see him as the rather uncouth and broad-spoken undergraduate he was at Cambridge. Few of the great Victorians seem quite complete until they have mellowed; they do not, like the Lake Poets or the chestnut, burst out into one glory of May blossoms, and then settle down to a sober and blossomless maturity. They are not spendthrifts of their inspiration, squandering it all in a few ecstatic years, but they prudently conserve it, so that their personalities may have scope to develop, and make the most of the fifty or so years of active creation to which youth may reasonably aspire.

And yet romance was the very breath of the early Victorian culture. To react quickly and appropriately to every possible impression was a social duty. Even if you had not emotions, you were expected to simulate them. The minx must assume an agitated bashfulness, the haridan look up with submissive devotion into her victim's face when posing for the daguerreotype, the heaviest swell brush away a manly tear upon due occasion. Romance was, in fact, far more unquestioned in its sway than it ever had been in Georgian times, when its torchbearers were still something of rebels. It had become the fashion, almost a tyranny. But the element of unrestraint had departed from it.

For the final triumph of romance had come with the

triumph of the middle class, and the middle class had not parted with its Puritan discipline. "Thus far," said the still, small voice of the Lord and the loud, large voice of Mrs. Grundy, "shalt thou react, and no further." Mr. Tennyson would never have dared to demand his "faint smiler Adeline," or his "airy, fairy Lilian," or even his "gay young hawk, my Rosalind," in the way Keats had approached his Fanny, or Shelley his Emilia, still less with the Byronic

"I ask not, I care not, if guilt's in thy heart."

The utmost to which he ever aspired was to be the miller's daughter's necklace, and in this innocuous form to be left on at night. Even so, he was perhaps sailing a little close to the wind. For young Mr. Tennyson's propriety, like that of Miss Charlotte Brontë, was not entirely free from suspicion.

By the thirties, Romance had learnt to accommodate itself to the standards of the English drawing-room, or genteel parlour. There was its temple, and the Young Lady was its high priestess. However hard-worked and practical they might be in reality, the dream life of Flora and Caroline was passed in a world of castles and abbeys peopled by polite men in armour and saintly ecclesiastics, and haunted by well-mannered spectres. Not that Romance limited itself to a Gothic dreamland. Lord Byron had brought in a fashion for Turks and corsairs, and Scott had shown what could be done with ruffs and trunk-hose. Anything remote and fantastic would do for a *mise en scene*. The greatest as well as the least inspired poets conformed to the prevailing fashion. Tennyson's

Princess was openly and avowedly a country house party entertainment, and Browning distilled the pure essence of romantic chivalry and wildness and gloom into his *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*.

But we shall get better into the romantic atmosphere by studying, not the works of outstanding genius, but the everyday and mostly forgotten manifestations of the reigning enthusiasm. Some of the most characteristic of these are to be found in young ladies' albums of the time, with the little complimentary poems, often touched with religious sentiment, in which whiskered swains, their hair reeking with bear's grease, strive to live up to the rôle assigned them of Christian knights and stainless gentlemen. Or we may peruse the numbers of *The Keepsake*, an aristocratic annual that may still be picked up in the second-hand shops, and in which the romantic spirit is exploited to the sentimental utmost.

Let us take any one of these numbers at random, say that of 1843. Here we shall find, among a distinguished list of contributors, the Countess of Blessington, the Marchioness of Hastings, the Baroness de Calabrella, the future Lord Houghton, Lord William Lennox, Lord John Manners, Sir Hesketh Fleetwood, and that autocrat of dinner tables, Bernal Osborne.* And here are the names of some of the contributions:

Servian Jealousy—The Baron's Vow—The Skeleton Hand—Lines from the Graves—Thoughts on Death—The Brother's Revenge—Death and the Child—He Told Her That He Loved Her Not—A Few Passages in the Life of Bayard.

* Then Ralph Bernal.

These titles should be sufficiently descriptive of the contents, but one quotation may suffice for a sample of the literary fare provided. It is from *The Lay of Sir Eglamour and Lady Claribel* by Charles Howard:

“Around the portal hollyhocks are flaunting,
The larkspur blooms,
The vesper wind the secret bower is haunting
With rich perfumes.
What boot the fragrant tendrils that inweave it?
The evening shine?
Ah! well-a-day! Sir Eglamour must leave it
For Palestine.”

It will be seen that nothing was so dear to the romantic heart as a refined melancholy. The sensibility deplored by Jane Austen had become a part of ordinary good manners, and ladies showed their breeding by an occasional fainting fit or mild hysterical outburst.

The authoress who laid on melancholy thickest was Mrs. Hemans, who enjoyed an immense reputation as a poetess and who supplied the words for many of the most popular drawing-room songs. From the back-cover of a young lady's song book, in the forties, I have compiled the following cheerful selection of the ditties of this most popular authoress:

Better Land (The)—Bring Flowers—Brother's Dirge—Burial in the Desert—Child's First Grief (The)—England's Dead—First Grey Hair (The)—Graves of a Household—He Never Smiled Again—Hour of Death (The)—Knight's Tomb (The)—Miserere, Miserere, Pity Us Good Lord—Parting Gifts—Parting Song (The)—Passing

Away—Songs of Captivity—Those Muffled Drums—Toll for the Brave—Toll Slowly—Wild Watcher (The).

We can well believe that our Victorian Flora's stock would have risen in the matrimonial market in proportion to whatever melancholy she could contrive to impart to the rendering of these pieces, and that few eligible bachelors would have been able to resist the tears that more or less spontaneously welled to a pair of gazelle-like eyes framed in ringlets.

Her taste was certainly not "low-brow." In one typical book of bound-up songs, I find on various title pages the names of Byron, Tennyson, Mrs. Norton—Meredith's Diana, Clare, Lockhart, Schubert, and Donizetti. Mixed with their productions are others, that aspire to be even more soulful, like a certain Mrs. Crawford's *Kathleen and Dermot*, an attempt, evidently, to go one better than Tom Moore, and described as a "Balled," a Balled, I suppose, being a particularly intense form of ballad. Intense is almost too mild a word for the scene depicted on the cover—the interior of a cathedral, constructed on no known principles of architecture. Where the central aisle of the choir ought to be is a Byzantine column, supporting one side of an arch of which the other is apparently supported on air. In the nave are pointed arches reposing on Doric columns. In the foreground a Victorian young lady appears recumbent, on what seems to be a Renaissance tomb, beneath a decorated canopy, and by this tomb is seated a decrepit and disgruntled druid, trying to balance his harp on his lap and play it with one and the same hand. Here is one verse of his outpourings:

"The chambers are lonely, the hearth is neglected,
No voice kindly welcome (sic) the pilgrim at night,
No banquet is spread, for no guest is expected,
They slumber in death that made all things so bright.
The halls are deserted, the bard only lingers
To pour out his griefs for the lovely and brave,
The proud battle notes that once trilled from his fingers
Are softened and changed in a derge (sic) to the grave,
For Kathleen and Dermot, farewell! farewell!"

It is a comfort to know that for ladies whose temperaments were too obstinately cheerful, or whose noses were too frivolously tip-tilted, for such dismal doggedness as that of Mrs. Crawford or Mrs. Hemans, romance provided an outlet in songs about gipsies, who, we are assured,

"Feel no care, and they dread no strife,"

or the customs of shepherds, as exemplified in the following description:

"'Tis the shepherd's evening bell
That o'er the vale resounds,
As homeward through the dell
The shepherd lightly bounds;
Soon in the fold again
Will the flock be safely stor'd,
And on the verdant plain
Be spread the frugal board;
And when the harvest moon
O'er the meadows throws its glance
With a happy heart he'll join

The merry village dance,
The merry village dance!"

On the whole, though, we fancy that a wise mamma would, except in very intractable cases, train her daughters to forsake these paths of levity for the solemn and compelling intensity of the Balled and the Derge.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BUMBLE OF THE REFORM BILL

THE Victorian Era—so far as the expression has any historical value—dawned with the bourgeois revolution. The accession of the young Queen, five years later, was an event of considerable, but by no means of epoch-making importance. Even the Court had begun to take on a new respectability under the auspices of Queen Adelaide, whose work of purification her determined little niece merely continued. What dominates the whole situation is that, between 1832 and 1867, the middle class, as defined by the limit of the ten-pound householder franchise, not only ruled politically, but spiritually. In the full glow of vigour and self-confidence, it set itself to the task of straightening out the social and economic tangle caused by the Industrial Revolution.

There is no subject upon which so much unprofitable ink has been spilled as that of the first Reform Bill. The bubble of Whig eulogy has been pricked, and there is hope that not many decades hence even academic circles may cease to get excited as to the precise means by which a number of commonplace politicians succeeded in employing the mass-feeling of the populace to advance the cause of its social superiors. The mountains laboured and brought forth this sleek town mouse. As the democratic triumph for which mobs had rioted, and the beautiful Queen's Square at Bristol been wrecked, the Bill was no

doubt a colossal fraud, which even, in one or two constituencies, deprived the common people of their franchise. But it could hardly at that time have been anything else without precipitating national disaster.

The brutal, illiterate mob, without a mind of its own, with its record of Bristol Riots, Swing Riots, Luddite Riots, Gordon Riots, Wilkes Riots, Excise Riots, stretching back for the past century, and its recent feats of smashing the Duke of Wellington's windows and mobbing him on Waterloo Day, was in no condition to take over the government of the country. The upper class monopoly of power had definitely broken down. The middle class at least knew what it wanted; its top hats covered the pick of the community's brains; it owned most of the capital behind the new machinery; it gave leadership to the new industrial expansion. The Reform Bill did no more than recognise facts, by putting power into the hands of those best fitted to exercise it. That is its true, and only defence. It was bourgeois, not democratic, and in fact the bottom dog was soon to find, in the new Poor Law, that the little finger of a Radical economist could be thicker than the old squire's loins. But even so, it might be argued, the best place for so untrained a dog was still at the bottom.

That, however, was not realised in any quarter at the time. All were agreed that the Reform Bill was a democratic triumph of revolutionary importance. To high and dry Tories it seemed as if the end of the world had come. The House of Lords, the Church, the Crown, would be swept away in the wake of the Rotten Boroughs, the Constitution burst in pieces, and the flood-

gates of Jacobinism opened. The real democrats, who had organised runs on the banks and disaffection among the troops, were proportionately sanguine. They had roared for the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill, and it took them a little time to discover that what they had got was—nothing but the Bill.

The middle-class electorate was in no hurry to press home its victory. There was an overwhelming Whig majority in the new Parliament, but Whig government was no new thing, and the list of ministers was as aristocratic as any Tory combination of the old régime. The Radical element in the Commons was insignificant numerically, though its brains gave it an importance out of proportion to its numbers. A middle-class government was a thing hardly dreamed of, as yet. The ten-pound householder felt it an honour to be governed by a lord.

None the less, the popular instinct rightly divined that a new era had dawned with the passing of the Bill. The middle class might not be in office, but it was in power, and it only needed time to make that power effective. The Greys and Russells, the Melbournes and Palmerstons, owed their official existence to the ten-pound householder, and must accordingly study how to keep him in a good humour. An utterly different spirit informed the political atmosphere. The Whig government, in power by the new electorate, felt itself compelled to embark on what, for those days, was a course of heroic legislation, to satisfy its new masters. Slavery was abolished, the first effective factory law passed, the Poor Law reconstructed, and, finally, after a premature attempt on the

part of His Majesty to bring the Tories back, the principle of the Reform Bill was extended to the municipal franchise. But the impulse to reform had now spent itself. Lord Grey, an upright and enormously philo-progenitive aristocrat, who had served his apprenticeship with Fox, was succeeded as Premier by Lord Melbourne, a genial cynic of the true eighteenth century tradition, whose reaction to any constructive proposal was, "Why can't they leave it alone?" But the new electorate had no use for King Log, and a few years of Whig marking time were sufficient to bring back the Tories, with an overwhelming majority, under a thoroughly middle-class leader. And it soon became apparent that a Tory government of the old sort was impossible, so, to the horror of the landed gentry, their own Premier, Peel, who had taken office for the specific purpose of supporting the agricultural interest by Protection, sold the pass, and identified himself with the middle class policy of Free Trade in Corn.

The landed gentry had thus to bow their heads eventually to the middle class yoke. But the disillusion of the manual labourers, who had expected such great things from the new franchise, was quicker in coming. The new governing class was humane, according to its lights. It was chiefly through evangelical enthusiasm that the long campaign against slavery was crowned with final success. The Factory Act of 1833 was a genuine attempt at social reform, and showed that a doctrinaire individualism was by no means the only consideration with legislators. But the West Indies were far off, and nobody

seriously apprehended more than a comparatively trifling inconvenience to the factory owners from a few modest concessions.

It was a different matter when it was a question of maintaining a cheap and certain supply of labour for the all-important end of intensive production. Early in 1834, an atrocious sentence of seven years' transportation was passed upon half a dozen Dorsetshire labourers, for the crime of peacefully combining to resist a reduction of wages to six shillings a week, and it was only after endless shiftings and delays, and by dint of formidable agitation, that the men were got back from their captivity. This shows the spirit in which the ruling class was likely to act in reforming the Poor Law. Its measure of 1834 did, in fact, provide a simple solution for an admittedly difficult problem, but only by imposing a compulsion to work more formidable than the West Indian planter's lash. Those who were unable to find some employment to keep them alive on a wage, were to be kept alive indeed, but under conditions of such calculated misery that the acceptance of any offer of employment, on any terms, would be preferable to enduring them. By dint of centralised control and minute regulations, it was hoped that any possible loophole for humanity might be effectually blocked.

This very important piece of legislation, which may fairly be described as the cornerstone of the early Victorian social system, was certainly scientific. The best brains procurable had been set to the task of investigation, exhaustive evidence had been collected, and a Commission's report drawn up that most people will admit

to have been a conspicuously able piece of work. The system that the new law superseded, by which the Justices of the Peace had supplemented wages out of rates, was no doubt wasteful and demoralising—though recent research tends to show that the gravest charge against it, that of stimulating a reckless increase of population, has been overstated. But this form of magisterial socialism, evolved as it was almost spontaneously as a war measure, did at least represent an attempt on the part of the county gentry to deal with their inferiors in a humane and Christian spirit. No such emotional bias marred the calculations of those who framed the new Poor Law.

Their object was simple, and was to conscript the whole labour power of the wage-earning class on the most economical terms. The effect of the new machinery had been to imbue the middle class with a blind faith in production, as an end in itself.

Progress consisted in laying up more and more treasures on earth. Capital became productive in proportion as it was laid out in producing more capital. In spite of all the talk about the greatest happiness principle, the sober citizens of the thirties thought of wealth almost exclusively as a thing to be produced, and hardly at all as a thing to be enjoyed. As in the old Puritan saga, a man, no longer in rags, but in sombre garments, broke into a lamentable cry of "What shall I do?" and a young evangelist, from the town of Ecclefechan in Scotland, gave answer: "Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God's name!"

In the new Puritan dispensation, there was no quarter for sin, and poverty was evidence of sin. Like the Psalmist, the respectable citizen could never believe that the righteous—which was the same thing as the productive—would come to want, or that his seed would beg their bread. If by old age or sickness a person became incapable of supporting himself, that was because he had not cultivated habits of thrift in the days of his strength. To maintain him in comfort at the public expense would not only be to encourage sin—or unproductiveness—but to plunder the righteous for the benefit of the wicked. To show mercy on his children would be to encourage the sins of the fathers by refusing to visit them in the proper quarter. In all this we see how the jargon may be that of the economists, but the voice is the authentic voice of the Lord, the God of Isaac Watts and of William Wilberforce and of Mr. Fairchild.

It was, therefore, in the full assurance of righteousness that the new Puritans provided their social system with a Hell, or rather with a number of Hells, for this was the function that the Union workhouses—which the poor flattered by the title of Bastilles—were deliberately, and scientifically calculated to serve. The spirit of these men may have been stern, but it was sternly logical. They were no more merciful to sinners, by poverty, in their own ranks. There was a debtor's jail for unsuccessful capitalists as well as a workhouse for improvident labourers. And however much you might sentimentalise over some delicate young lady in ringlets, once let her father lose his bank balance, and her lot, as governess, might well be one of brutal and completely unsentimen-

tal exploitation.* Whiskered chivalry fought shy of insolvency.

It was the new Poor Law that finally opened the eyes of those politically minded workers, who had supplied the brute force behind the Reform Bill agitation, to the true nature of their achievement. Their rage broke forth in the great and formidable Chartist agitation, that only finally collapsed in that year of revolutions, 1848. The Charter that they demanded was the really democratic measure of Reform that they had been simple enough to credit the Whig party with having provided for them. This time there should be no mistake about it—power should be transferred from the middle class to the mass of the people.

But it was one thing to put the brute force of the mob behind the brains and energy of the bourgeoisie, and quite another to expect that force to function effectually by itself. There was no means of concentrating the indignation of men so ignorant and so untrained to common action as the wage-earners of that time. They could produce no greatness or even unity of leadership from among their own ranks. Nor was superior force at their command, so long as Wellington's long-service veterans stood fast by their officers. It was enough, at the time when the Chartist menace came nearest to revolutionary action, for a general of Liberal tendencies to explain to the men's leaders by what precise military means, if it came to blows, an undisciplined mob would be torn to pieces by artillery, mowed down by musketry, and its

* Though not by any means always. One has heard of Victorian governesses who became honoured and permanent friends of the family. But new wealth, like new wine, goes to the head.

remnants cut to pieces by the sabres of charging squadrons.

And meanwhile, in the Bastilles, Hell, more squalid and unrelieved than anything imagined by Dante, was performing its appointed work of stimulating production. At one end of the scale little children, destined for the sweated labour market, were being inured to misery on the cheapest possible terms, at the other, Joan was being torn from Darby, lest any spark of love should mitigate the wretchedness of their declining years. The measure worked admirably. Now that it was better to be dead than a pauper, pauperism was reduced to a minimum. The waste and demoralisation of the old system were effectually checked. Production went on faster than ever.

Of course there were complaints. Even staunch Tories, like Oastler and Sadler, denounced, with unmeasured violence, what they were pleased to consider the oppression of the poor. But ears that had been roared into, week in, week out, by Cobbett, were hardened to invective. It was different when the most brilliant of a rising constellation of authors, assisted by one of the foremost black-and-white artists of his time, drew the attention of the whole nation to the spectacle of a starving child, asking for more—in vain. And then, having moved his audience to tears, this same Charles Dickens set them rocking with laughter by embodying the spirit of the new law, and the result of the Commission's labours, in the person of Mr. Bumble.

For there was romance as well as utilitarianism in Victorian England, and things whose necessity could be demonstrated by statistics, might be felt as intolerable.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW OPTIMISM

THE most striking triumphs of the middle class were not to be registered in the field of politics. During the four mid-decades of the century, an overwhelming proportion of Victorian talent and genius was found in its ranks. Its ideals were hardly questioned, what philosophy there was emanated from its pundits, its respectability served for a moral code that not the stoutest sinner dared openly defy, its Lord was God, even of professed unbelievers. Its time of supreme power was also one of supreme opportunity. Civilisation was in the melting pot. The task of reconstruction was one for which the old governing class plainly possessed neither the imagination nor the will. The manual workers, unorganised and uneducated, might conceivably have destroyed the social system—it was wholly beyond their capacity to fashion another. But the middle class, brimming over with energy, superbly self-confident, felt itself equal to this, or any other task that might be imposed upon it. The new Pandora's box had taken the form of a top hat.

The opening of the Victorian era, which really dates from the beginning of the thirties, was one of those spring-tide periods when life seems aglow with new-born energy, and blossom all around into genius. Browning's "glad, confident morning," would serve as a description of it. The period of depression and disillusionment fol-

lowing the French war was definitely over. Nobody bothered any more about the Jacobin menace. Eyes were turned forward with hope, not backward with apprehension. The Reform Bill had shown that Englishmen were still as capable as ever of reconciling liberty with order, and wedding the spirit of progress to that of the Constitution. Tennyson's conception of freedom

"broadening down
From precedent to precedent,"

was no platitude to the men of his time, but stood for a national achievement more unique and startling than that of Waterloo. Burke would never have believed it possible; Wellington and the old Tories had striven against change in the belief that England, once started on the inclined plane of democracy, would go the way of revolutionary France.

This paralysing belief that any sort of reform was fraught with the peril of revolution, was finally dissipated by the success of the Reform Bill. Whatever might have been the case in France—and even France had found a way of making revolution respectable—progress in England had proved itself an eminently safe thing. Like the new steam engines, it might go forward at a speed hitherto undreamed of, but always along its appointed lines—which Tennyson visualised as grooves—and under the control of signals. The mere fact that the signals had been at danger for so long, made it all the more necessary to make up for lost time. In every department of national activity, the orders were "full steam ahead."

Among the middle class, especially, a robust optimism

had been the prevailing sentiment even before the seal was set upon it by the Reform Bill. The man in the street, no less than his intellectual leaders, seems to have been convinced that great changes were taking place, year by year, the effect of which would be to make the world, and everybody in it, unimaginably better. It was a process to which no limits could be set—the better you got, the faster you might hope to go on being better. It is about this time that the habit develops of speculating about the future, or looking back with tolerant pity on the not very remote past. The thing became a drawing-room amusement. In a young lady's album, in my possession, some young wag has imagined a gentleman of George II's time transported into the—then—present, and going for a journey on the Quicksilver coach. Even though the idea of railways does not seem to have dawned on the writer's imagination, excellent fun is made of the gentleman's abject terror, as the vehicle sways, at a headlong twelve or fifteen miles an hour, along the wonderful macadamised road. *The Keepsake*, that elegant and aristocratic annual, dips into the future, three hundred years ahead from 1830, when the journey to Edinburgh takes seven and a half hours, beggars talk Latin, doors are opened by steam porters and letters drafted by steam secretaries, pheasants are mowed down by a sort of machine gun, newspapers come out every six hours, and people talk to each other, at a distance, by means of telescopes. One passage is of ominous and prophetic import.

"I have heard," says Lady D., "that corn is rising in price: what is the reason?"

"The harvest," explains Lord A., "has failed in Tartary, and you know that the state of foreign harvests affects our prices much more than that of our own."

"I wonder," said Lady D., "we don't grow corn in England enough to feed our population."

"Enough," breaks in Mr. C., "to feed our population! My dear Lady D., we have hardly enough to feed our game!"

Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* was not published till 1842, when, though the tide of optimism was still at the flood, the poet's own philosophic honesty allowed him to entertain sombre doubts as to whether the god Progress might not after all be a devil in disguise. Here, there is the beatific vision of the heavens filled, not with angels, but with commerce, and of a war in the air, to the accompaniment of much shouting and a rain of blood, being followed by a world Parliament and, presumably, more commerce than ever. But there was that grim Malthusian threat of

"a hungry people like a lion creeping nigher,"

and Tennyson's own intuition that, though knowledge might come, wisdom might linger—in other words, that to improve machines without improving men, might lead to progress in a direction opposite to heavenward.

But Tennyson—however antipathetic his cautious and tentative philosophy may be to the cocksureness of an age that has no time to philosophise at all—could be, when the spirit moved him, one of the profoundest, as well as the most representative thinkers of his time. And his depth was in almost direct proportion to that honest

doubt that he esteemed above all the creeds. It was only in his certainties—about the Crimean War, for example—that he was shallow. But doubt, honest or otherwise, troubled few of the early Victorians. If M. Coué's formula were a talisman, that would have been a golden age indeed, since—except for the disillusioned and voteless Chartists, and a dwindling clique of diehard aristocrats—there was a general and stentorian conviction that there was no country like England and no age like the present.

This conviction of righteousness had been gaining strength for some time before the seal was put upon it by the apparent success of the Reform Bill. It was an age of strenuous self-improvement, founded upon the conviction that in science, and particularly the kind of science that could be applied to commerce and industry, could be found the key to all progress and all perfection. Everywhere the effort was being made to make science popular. In 1823, Birkbeck founded the London Mechanics' Institute, and other institutes of this kind were started in the new industrial centres, attracting particularly the aristocracy of labour, such as the engineers, many of whom, both at home and abroad, were able to coin their skill into very lucrative wages. In 1825, the first steps were taken towards founding London University, an entirely middle class affair, conducted on non-sectarian lines, a formidable rival to the aristocratic and reactionary Oxford, and the only slightly more liberal Cambridge.

It was Henry Brougham who coined the phrase "the schoolmaster is abroad," though the fact that Brougham himself was abroad was even more significant of an age

that honoured him as an intellectual leader. He was one of those characters in real life who would appear incredible in fiction. He was so marvellously ill-favoured as to possess some of the attractiveness of a gargoyle. He had neither dignity, nor what a Roman would have called gravity. As Lord Chancellor, he distinguished himself by belching from the Woolsack. He once put about a story of his own death, in order to get a free advertisement in the obituary columns. In his own profession of the law, despite dazzling abilities and irresistible eloquence, the diarist Greville declared that the ridicule and aversion he excited as Chancellor were universal. No colleague could work with him, and not all his brilliance, nor even the fear of his vindictiveness, could prevent the Whig government from shedding him at the first opportunity.

Nevertheless Brougham stands for the embodiment of that peculiar optimism of progress that was growing in the early thirties, though being of the Georgian tradition, he had none of the moral earnestness of the budding Victorians. Like the middle class, from which he would not admit himself to be sprung—for he had a thoroughly bourgeois capacity for detecting the blood of Norman barons in his veins—his ambitions, and confidence in his own powers, were alike boundless. "There," said Rogers the poet, as Brougham drove away, "go Solon, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Archimedes, Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Chesterfield, and a great many more in one postchaise." He went about jingling a bunch of keys to all knowledge and all mysteries. He was a universal reformer. Being incapable of looking deeply enough into any problem

to appreciate its complexities, he was also a universal provider of ready-made solutions.

It was only to be expected that such a man should place himself at the head of the movement for getting wise quick, or science without tears, that was responsible for a great mass of cheap and improving literature. Brougham was one of those who helped to found "The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge," and started it off with an essay of his own on *The Pleasures and Advantages of Science*, of which the substance, being as platitudinous as the title, ensured for it a great popular reception. The appetite for Useful Knowledge, which, to men like Brougham, meant facts without philosophy and expansion without depth, was catered for by a variety of publications that often reached a surprisingly high level of excellence, and were at least more thorough and less slapdash than many a cheap potboiler that the specialists of our own day are induced to knock off at odd moments and sweated rates.

No doubt it was an excellent thing that the school-master should be abroad, and that even grown-up people should apply themselves to the improvement of their minds. Though the bubble of Brougham's reputation has long been pricked, and his most enduring title to fame, the fusty conveyance that in one's boyhood used to rumble one home from the station, is almost as forgotten as his writings, his work for the freedom of slaves, the reform of the law, and the diffusion of knowledge, should outweigh his faults in the final reckoning. But there was a danger lest, in the unprecedented crisis that confronted humanity at this time, people should be encour-

aged to believe that the gospel of salvation was to be found in penny encyclopædias, and that the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was an acceptable substitute for the complete mental and spiritual readjustment to a revolutionised environment, that mankind must make or perish. There was a more ominous import than Tennyson perhaps realised in his lines:

“Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell,
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.”

The fact is that this age, so abounding in energy, so fruitful of mechanical invention, was almost bankrupt of a philosophy. The task of enlarging the empire of man over matter, and liberalising obsolete institutions, was one that seemed to call for nothing more than practical commonsense, and it was mere waste of time to sit cogitating about the ultimate significance of the changes that were taking place. It was only practical men in a hurry who could ever have taken seriously so muddled a philosophy as that of Bentham, with his push-pin-poetry calculus. When we think that Brougham, and James Mill, and Martin Tupper passed for men of light and leading with the educated public, we can judge of the demand there was likely to be for subtle or profound thought.

But there had arisen one greater than Brougham to interpret the spirit of the age. It was in 1825 that Thomas Babington Macaulay had leapt into youthful fame with an article on Milton in *The Edinburgh Review*. It was

in 1837, the year of the Queen's accession, that he made a new edition of Bacon's works the excuse for writing Bacon's life, and that, again, the excuse for proclaiming his own gospel under the guise of expounding Bacon's. Two words form its key, Utility and Progress. All else is vanity and word-spinning. The only fruitful philosophy is that which concerns itself with supplying what Macaulay himself alludes to as vulgar wants.

We do not imagine that those who are most scornful of Macaulay's Philistinism would find it too easy a task to refute him. His case is put with downright, John Bullish commonsense. The endeavour to make men perfect can do no more than "fill the world with long words and long beards." "The wise men of the Stoics would, no doubt, be a grander object than a steam-engine. But there are steam-engines. And the wise man of the Stoics is yet to be born." Or to put it still more plainly, and in a way that would have shocked even Macaulay, it is better to serve Mammon than God, because the former can reward you with treasures on Earth, whereas the latter can only give you treasures in heaven, which, to Macaulay, are about as valuable as cheques payable in moonshine. Therefore scrap philosophy, annihilate spiritual values, and get something really useful and progressive. Among various benefits to be derived from this new gospel, Macaulay includes the lengthening of human life, and the furnishing of "new arms to the warrior," for the purpose, presumably, of cutting it short. But it is all progress, so what does it matter?

Macaulay, at least, was robustly confident that progress was a good thing, and industrialised England on the high

road to Utopia. He revelled in statistics of increasing population, expanding commerce, multiplying wealth. The prospect of suburban villas moved him to ecstasies. When Southey, the Poet Laureate, dared to contrast the beauty of the old cottages with the hideousness of the new manufacturing towns, Macaulay retorted with a positive bellow of indignation: "Here is wisdom. Here are the principles on which nations should be governed. Rose bushes and poor rates rather than steam-engines and independence. . . . Mr. Southey has found out a way, he tells us, in which the effects of manufactures and agriculture may be compared. And what is this way? To stand on a hill, to look at a cottage and a factory, and to see which is the prettier." You cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and when progress is afoot, you cannot, even by the admission of a poet like Macaulay, bother about such trifles as beauty.

The conclusion of the whole matter, so far as Macaulay and the great middle class for which he stood are concerned, is fairly summed up in the conclusion of this review, written in 1830:

"By the prudence and energy of the people . . . England has hitherto been carried forward in civilisation; and it is to the same prudence and the same energy that we now look with comfort and good hope. Our rulers will best promote the improvement of the nation by strictly confining themselves to their own legitimate duties, by leaving capital to find its most lucrative course, commodities their fair price, industry and intelligence their natural reward, idleness and folly their natural punishment, by maintaining peace, by defending property,

by diminishing the price of the law, and by observing strict economy in every department of the State. Let the Government do this: the People will assuredly do the rest."

Sentiments so inspiring as this can hardly fail to be rounded off with an involuntary "Hear! hear!" No wonder that the Gospel of Progress was received with gladness from the lips of Thomases so undoubting as this! And even Macaulay falls short of the lilting finality of Browning's, or rather Pippa's

"God's in his heaven,
All's right with the world!"

the God in question being not unlike our old friend, the eighteenth century Deity, grown hearty, and a little vulgar, in His second childhood. However far this may have fallen short of expressing Browning's own philosophy of life, it summarises pretty fairly the robustuous optimism of the average middle class Englishman, an optimism that was steadily rising, throughout the thirties and forties, and reached its high water mark about the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VICTORIAN ZENITH

WHILE men of letters were thus prodigal in spilling the ink of optimism, men of affairs were hard at work translating that of optimism into the fact of history. And English history, as the men of that time understood it, and as it was written long afterwards, constitutes a sufficiently respectable record. The fears aroused at the time of the Reform Bill were now dissipated. The throne stood; the Lords sat fast on their crimson benches; the Church seemed more solidly established than at any time in its Protestant existence. And the party game of Whig and Tory, with its atmosphere of genteel corruption, and its alternation of aristocratic Cabinets, went on to all appearance very much as before. It was the hey-day of Taper and Tadpole, though they were at work behind the scenes, and did not get into the records. English History consisted of the manœuvres and contentions and policies of such substantial gentlemen as Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel, as Palmerston and Aberdeen and Graham and Derby, men whose very names on the directorate of the firm, John Bull and Co., constituted, in most peoples' eyes, a guarantee of permanence.

The works of these men, and the laws that they fathered, and the history that they made are recorded in volumes as substantial as themselves. The story of the Victorian Age, as the Victorians themselves understood

it, is told, at length, and with dignity, by Sir Spencer Walpole.* We wonder how many modern readers have accomplished the labour of its perusal. It is not Sir Spencer's fault if such rare and arduous bibliophiles are left wondering whether these matters, that seemed so important to their grandparents, are really worth setting out in such detail. Whether or not a Whig Duchess should be Mistress of the Robes, or Palmerston should have his tit for tat with John Russell, of how many still-born Reform Bills Lord John was father, or for how many useless fortifications Pam could succeed in touching a neuro-patriotic taxpayer, on what point of national honour the British Navy consented to play the part of bailiff for a Portuguese Shylock, what horrid invasions were supposed to be meditated by Napoleon III, and before him, by the Prince de Joinville, how much murderous excitement could be worked up over what Mr. Jorrock described as "Nicholas Rumenough's wagaries"—these and similar things that loomed so large in contemporary eyes, appear in our perspective,

"As foolish as a fable,
And feeble as a pointless jest."

We glean the same impression from conventional Victorian history as from all but the very best Victorian fiction, namely, that the most important part of the story is that which a decent reticence forbids. For indeed the most important thing of all, in the long run, was the least mentionable—for it consisted in the increase of the population beyond any means of subsistence that these

* He leaves off at 1880.

islands were capable of furnishing. And the ways and means of such increase were taboo.

It was, in fact, the habit of the Victorians to take for granted the broad outlines of their social system, and to busy themselves about improving the details. Even to the Radicals, whose very name committed them to getting at the root of things, it did not occur that the way to find roots is to delve below the surface. During the years of middle class rule, it would have seemed hardly sane to doubt that the results of the Industrial Revolution were good in themselves, that better machinery, and increased production, and the advance of science, must, by their very nature, lead to a beneficent progress. And if a few exceptional spirits, like Ruskin and Newman, harked wistfully back to the traditions of an earlier, simpler age, this was too much in harmony with the fashionable romantic pose to be taken very seriously by practical men.

If it was the habit of the Victorians to shirk contact with vital issues, certainly all the circumstances of the time combined to encourage them. Until well on into the seventies, England enjoyed a perilous run of good luck. The lead she had obtained in the industrial race, that enabled her to become first the workshop and afterwards the bank of the world; was well maintained during the fifties and sixties, owing to the fact that her principal prospective competitors were busy settling their internal and external differences by force of arms. The most formidable rival of all, the United States, threw herself temporarily out of the running by plunging into a long and exhausting civil war.

Yet another of England's problems, that threatened to become more immediately pressing, she was enabled, by a terrible stroke of fortune, to shelve. When within three years of their great Reform Bill, the Whigs settled down to a time of comfortable stagnation, there stepped to the front of the stage the huge figure of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish "Liberator," and Irish affairs demanded an ever-increasing share of the politicians' attention. This was because the situation created by Pitt's Act of Union with Ireland in 1801 was one that was bound, sooner or later, to become impossible. Like so many other of the legislative expedients of that period, it had been a war measure, dictated by overmastering military necessity. England could not afford a practically independent Ireland on her flank, and accordingly the Irish Parliament had to be got rid of by the only possible legal means, that of bribing its members. This golden argument was employed by those realistic patriots, Pitt and Castlereagh, with as little hesitation as that of lead and cold steel had been. Unfortunately the insane fidelity of George III to his coronation oath forbade them the only concession by which Union could have been palatable to the Irish, that of votes for Catholics. This was forced from a Tory government in 1829, for the excellent reason that they were unable to face a civil war, in which the considerable Irish part of our army might have mutinied. The lesson that John Bull will concede to fear what he will refuse to justice, was not thrown away on the Irish.

The fact is that the Act of Union had given Ireland the power, sooner or later, to make things intolerable for England. So long as the party game was played between

Whig-Liberals and Tory-Conservatives, there must always be the danger of an independent group in the House holding the balance and dictating its own conditions. Even a small and determined element in a British House of Commons, something more than indifferent to British interests, might inflict untold injury on the delicate mechanism of Parliamentary government. And finally, an Ireland, governed against her will, might constitute a liability rather than an asset to her governors.

But O'Connell, the big, loveable romantic, with his hatred of physical force and his devotion to "the darling Queen," was no Parnell, to play Ireland's cards with the cold ruthlessness of Bismarckian realism. Having by his patriotic eloquence brought her to the verge of revolution, he shrank from forcing a decision, and Peel and Wellington, in the early forties, with a solid Tory majority at their backs, were not disposed to surrender the Act of Union as easily as they had conceded the Catholic vote. The prestige of the Liberator was shattered, and the leadership of young Ireland was already passing into the hands of extremists, when a fearful disaster, that of the Black Famine, fell upon that most unhappy of all islands, reducing her population, ultimately, to about half its former numbers. To dilate on the horrors of those days is foreign to our purpose. Suffice it to say that Ireland's tragedy was England's release, and the Irish question ceased to be a serious trouble to her statesmen for another generation.

Thus the Victorians were enabled to indulge in their favourite habit of bequeathing the solution of vital problems to their heirs. Their attitude towards the Irish,

until the rise of Parnell gave them reason to change it, may be described as one of faintly benevolent contempt. The typical Irishman, as we see him in the pages of *Punch*, might well have been designed to prepare its readers for the reception of the Darwinian theory. The Irishman was a Yahoo, and—what was almost worse, a Papist, led by priests a degree more sub-human than himself. When he took to Fenianism, this confirmed John Bull in his opinion that the most effective way of appealing to Patrick was not to his reason but to his senses. Unfortunately, this was just what Patrick was learning about John, and the Treaty of 1921 put the seal on his estimate.

But if the Black Famine enabled the early Victorians to shelve the Irish question for an indefinite period, the even greater problem presented by the Industrial Revolution clamoured for some sort of a solution. That Revolution may be said to have consummated itself, to all intents and purposes, in the forties. The process of mechanising industry, though rapid beyond all precedent, had been more gradual and patchy than we are apt to realise to-day. In the Yorkshire woollen industry, as late as the forties, a few weavers and hand combers still carried on their work in their homes—the last survivors of the old domestic industries.* But now the railway had come to its own, and the process of mechanisation gathered irresistible momentum. Even Manchester—if we may trust the evidence of Disraeli's *Coningsby*—was con-

* For this I am indebted to Mr. Gerald Foster, whose family have so long been connected with the Bradford Wool Industry.

sidered, by go-ahead employers in places like Rochdale, behind the times in its machinery.

But even to such hardened optimists as middle class Englishmen, it was becoming evident that mechanical progress might prove a qualified blessing. The very name, "the hungry forties," that still clings to the decade, is sufficient reminder of the miserable condition into which the great majority of the working classes was plunged. The condition of the people was a question that positively forced itself upon the attention of any one with a brain to feel or a heart to think.

It was about 1841, that Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who, though an invalid and a spinster, could feel like a mother for little ones whose sufferings only reached her through the medium of print, published her "Cry of the Children":

"The young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free."

In the same year, *Punch* started on his long career as the representative, in motley, of average middle-class opinion, a *Punch* burning with indignation against social wrong, and quite innocent of the good taste that forbids even the jesters of our own time to disturb the complacency of comfortable people. In 1842, a Commission set up to enquire into the conditions of Child Labour issued the first of its reports, dealing with the mines, and this disclosed a state of things that profoundly shocked public opinion, even in those days of Ricardian economics. And

it was Mr. Horne's report on the State of Workers in Coal Mines that produced, two years later, a cartoon in *Punch* concerning Capital and Labour, that would, if brought up to date, be welcomed by any Bolshevik organ of Moscow or the Clydeside. It depicts a horrible contrast between bloated luxury above ground, and something worse than slavery below. And—in case this should seem a mere eccentricity of Radicalism—the fighting champion of the Diehard Tories against their own leader produced his *Sybil*, a merciless exposure of social injustice, written up, very largely, from the bare evidence of official reports.

It was not only in the new industrial districts that distress was acute. In what was still the basic industry of agriculture, the state of the workers during these "hungry forties" beggars description, and this largely owing to the very measures of protection that were taken to keep the English farmer from being overwhelmed by foreign competition. When wages were only a few shillings a week, and the price of food was forced up to artificial levels, it was impossible for Johnny Raw and his family to absorb the amount of nourishment that their human frames required. If they could keep alive at all, and avoid the Hell of the Poor-house Bastille, they had done as well as could be expected.

Even for the middle class itself, though its members were normally exempt from the pangs of physical hunger, prospects were none too rosy. It seemed as if it were impossible to realise the blessings of progress without ruining more people than were benefited. One of the worst of the now periodical financial smashes occurred

as the direct result of the revolution in transport, consummated in the first half of this hungry decade. A perfect mania of speculation seized upon the investing public, and there leapt into prominence the figure of Hudson, the Railway King, whose rise and fall would have been a fit subject for one of Balzac's novels. Hudson, however, fell on his feet, to the extent of ending his days in reasonable comfort, which is a great deal more than could be said for countless victims of his, and other speculators' megalomania.

During the forties, then, we have a growing conviction, that there was something in the condition of England that called for a remedy. But not even Dickens nor Disraeli, not the militant clique of journalists who staffed *Punch*, not more than very nebulously even Carlyle, detected a lack of adjustment of man to his environment that called for a fundamental change in human as well as mechanical civilisation. It was part of the peculiar Victorian sense of decency to avoid going to the roots of things. And the Victorians were not only decent, but eminently practical folks, which meant, that when they were faced with any difficulty, they went straight for a practical remedy. They acted in the spirit of people who, on perceiving a suspicious swelling, do not rush off to a specialist, who would probably order an operation, but contrive, by faith or some homely remedy, to keep it from hurting, and are triumphant if, at the end of a month, this policy has been successful.

The middle class, who held the reins of power, had no mind for any expedient that could be called revolutionary. The Chartist remedy, that of presenting a blank

cheque, in the shape of the franchise, to an uneducated proletariat, its commonsense had ruled out as premature, though its more advanced spirits were moving cautiously in the direction of universal suffrage. Socialism, a French importation into our language, was associated in most people's minds with the kindly and somewhat nebulous schemes of Robert Owen, a true romantic, whose ideal was as different as possible from the uncompromising realism and class war subsequently preached by Karl Marx. But Socialism was not yet practical enough politics to be felt, like Chartism, as a menace to respectable society.

The advanced thinkers of the middle class had, however, hit upon a remedy of their own for the admittedly deplorable condition of the people in the hungry forties. The problem to them was a simple one, and the solution equally simple. The people were hungry because they could not afford to buy food, particularly bread, and bread prices were being maintained at artificial levels to support the old governing class of the days before the Reform Bill. Therefore let trade be free, let the price of bread find its own natural level, and the poor man's wages would enable him to keep the wolf from the door. There was also the chance, not wholly displeasing to some rich employers of labour, that the poor man's wages might be cut down to suit the diminished cost of living.

There was another way in which the matter might have been regarded, had there been any one capable of probing the controversy to its depths. What the Industrial Revolution had done for England had been to commit her to a huge gamble. Every year her own natural

resources were becoming less and less adequate to maintain the ever-swelling hordes of her urban population. To an increasing extent she had to rely on the foreigner to feed her, and the foreigner would only do this in return for goods—mostly the product of her new factories. The protection of agriculture was an attempt to check this process, and—if not to make Britain self-supporting—at least to mitigate the mounting disproportion of what we ate to what we could possibly produce, or, in other words, to put some limits to the task imposed on future generations, of inducing foreigners to fill our bellies in return for the products of our mines and machines. No doubt we were in a fair way to become the workshop of the world, and the British Fleet was believed to rule the waves—but once let either of these two conditions fail to be fulfilled, at any future time, and England was doomed to a tragedy of starvation to which the horrors of the Black Famine in Ireland and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia would seem mild by comparison. That precisely was the gamble to which the Industrial Revolution had committed, and still commits, England.

The Free Trade solution consisted in solving the difficulties of that generation by increasing the stakes for posterity. Even if the true nature of the choice had been appreciated there would have been much to be urged in favour of such boldness. The Corn Laws were at least an incomplete brake on a process that had gathered too much momentum to be more than slightly retarded. There was no hope of making England a self-sufficing nation, no hope of emptying the hives of Oldham and Huddersfield into the unspoilt countryside. And the

Corn Laws, and Import Duties generally, were doing a great deal of immediate harm, not only in raising the price of living for the workers, but in handicapping efforts to capture the world's markets. There was never a time when British Industry was in less need of artificial support. And not even a Cobden could have appreciated the full strength of the position of England on the eve of a period during which her principal competitors would be engaged in knocking themselves and each other out of the running. As for agriculture—an urban electorate could allow that to take its chance, especially as the danger from the remission of the Corn Duties was less in the present than the future. And as for the future—whatever texts a Victorian might put on the walls of his room, there was one always engraven on his heart, to the effect that the day after to-morrow might take thought for the things of itself.

The Free Trade agitation was the first serious attempt of the electorate to impose a policy of its own upon the aristocratic magnates whom it permitted to administer its affairs. It is also the first indication of the way in which power had shifted from London and the South to the industrial North and Midlands. The leaders of the movement, prosperous, self-made business men, imparted to it something of the emotional fervour of a crusade. A cynic might have remarked that it was a very convenient crusade for such leaders. Not only did it divert working-class enthusiasm into a more harmless channel than that of Chartism, but the Corn Laws provided a serviceable stick for beating the rival agricultural interest. And when philanthropic gentlemen like Lord

Shaftesbury urged the business men to put their own house in order, and even proposed to interfere with the factory-owner's freedom to impose inhuman hours and conditions on his employes, it was possible, with magnificent audacity, to retort with the accusation of cant.

"This I will tell you," were the words of Richard Cobden, "that if you would give force and grace to your professions of humanity, it must not be confined to . . . occasional visits to factories to talk sentiment over factory children—you must un-tax the people's bread."

There is no need to doubt these men's earnestness, because—as was said of another earnest Victorian—they sometimes followed their consciences as a driver follows the horse. No one can fail to detect the true ring in Cobden's beautiful words to his friend, John Bright, after the death of Bright's first wife:

"There are thousands of houses in England at this moment where wives, mothers and children are dying of hunger. Now, when the first paroxysm of your grief is past, I would advise you to come with me, and we will never rest until the Corn Law is repealed."

Such was the fervour that swayed huge audiences, and finally swept even a Tory prime minister off his feet. Sir Robert Peel, who had come into office, in 1841, supported by the votes of the landed interest, with the avowed purpose of maintaining a Protectionist policy, was one of those eminent personages who seem to have been designed by Providence for the sub-acid purposes of the modern biographer. He was rich, respectable, awkward, a little smug, and a politician. He surrendered, under pressure, the principal causes he was pledged to defend.

Moreover he was portentously earnest, as befitted his time and middle-class origin, without the least spark of humour.

Sir Robert, the sleek politician, becomes the inevitable foil for his Tory colleague, the honest soldier Wellington. And yet their guiding principle was the same, that the King's or Queen's government must, at all sacrifice of party principles, be carried on. Only Wellington, being more habituated to command than to persuade, was less fitted to make the task of government a success than Peel, whose lifelong training had rendered him a past master in the technique of statesmanship. It was Peel's great achievement, on succeeding in 1841 to a notoriously inefficient Whig administration, to have selected and trained perhaps the ablest ministerial team of modern times. If Pope's test, that the government that is best administered is best, be applied to Peel, his reputation will stand unsurpassed. But his hold upon party principles was weak, and he was not the man to take long views. The future was no concern of his; it was enough if, under his auspices from year to year, England could be godly, and quietly, and prosperously governed.

To Peel's matter-of-fact intelligence, it soon became apparent that the protection of agriculture, to which he and his party were committed, was proving thoroughly bad business. Cautiously and by gradual stages, he convinced himself that the Corn Tax would have to follow most of the other import duties to the scrap heap. The deciding factor was the Black Famine in Ireland. "Rotten potatoes," as Wellington brutally put it, "have put Peel in his damned fright." It is doubtful whether the

repeal of the Corn Laws was an effective remedy for rotten potatoes. What an Irish Parliament would have done, and what no English statesman would have dared to suggest during the hungry forties, would have been to have detained in Ireland enough Irish corn to have sufficed to have kept her people alive when the potatoes failed.

But there was hunger in England as well as starvation in Ireland, and Peel, in his pedestrian fashion, believed that it is better for principles to be discarded and programmes to suffer, than for bellies to remain unfilled. It was easy for so brilliant a debater as Disraeli to put political faith above political expediency, and taunt his apostate leader in a series of scarifying phillipics. Peel had other objects in view than that of consistency to Tory principles. At heart he was no Tory. He had more in common with business men like Cobden, than with the nobility and gentry who had chosen him for their leader, and never quite regarded him as one of themselves. And when, after the bill repealing the Corn Laws had been passed under his auspices, and his own infuriated Die-hards had hurled him from office by voting against an Irish Coercion Bill with which most of them probably agreed, Peel closed his premiership with the simple words:

“It may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of good will by those whose lot it is to labour and earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened with a sense of injustice.”

The attitude of the still unconvinced landed gentry towards their lost leader and shattered customs barriers was certainly not determined by any more far-sighted calculations than those of Peel himself. The prospect of diminished rents affected them more than the spectacle of rotten potatoes and hungry labourers. Surtees, who understood them thoroughly, was speaking for the typical squire, through the mouth of Mr. Tom Scott of Hawbuck Grange, replying to the query of Lord Lionel Lazytongs as to whether he was a Tory.

"Dashed if I know what I am. . . . I *was* a Tory or Conservative or whatever you call it, and joined the *gobemouches* in abusing the Whigs and *hooraying* Sir Robert; but I've thrown up politics and devote myself to draining and d—ing him instead."

What Peel, for his part, thought of Mr. Scott and his like, may be judged from one of his letters to his wife at this time, in which he asks, with contemptuous exasperation, how those who pass their time in hunting, shooting and drinking can know the motives of those responsible for the public safety.

So, in 1846, the middle-class remedy for the disharmonies of the social order was applied, and England was finally committed to the alternative of perpetuating her command of the world's markets or suffering the agonies of starvation. But for a long time to come her position was assured. For the generation that followed the Repeal of the Corn Laws, Free Trade proved an overwhelming success. The hungry forties were succeeded by the prosperous fifties and—except for the Lancashire cotton famine—the even more prosperous sixties. Wealth increased

by leaps and bounds. Exports doubled and redoubled. Wages rose; the cost of living fell. Chartism collapsed like a pricked bubble. The working class, as a whole, seemed to have forgotten the spirit of Captain Swing and King Lud, and had not yet learnt that of Karl Marx. Even agriculture managed to pay its way without the assistance of the Corn Laws—for the competition of the Canadian wheat fields and the Middle West was not seriously felt during the fifties and sixties. Surveying the almost incredible statistics of material progress, the man in the street could hardly fail to conclude that mechanical civilisation had been justified by its fruits, and that the Victorian social order, if not yet perfect, was every day, and in every way, getting better and better.

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CHAPTER XIV

ENGLAND IN EARNEST

THOSE who wish to understand the Victorian Age, or the Victorians themselves, will be defeating their own purpose if they start by making the valet's distinction between the hero and his achievement. The Dickens who is more concerned with Maria Beadnell than the characters of his novels, the Ruskin whose tragedy is not that of social injustice but of Rose de la Touche, are like the kings of fairyland, whose highest function it is to strut about in ermine and interview their daughters' wooers. And the fairy tale, or Hamlet-minus-the-Prince-of-Denmark biography of So-and-so "the Man," are not the most appropriate forms for the solid substance of Victorian history.

To a reader who returns one of these all too human biographies of Victorians to the library counter, it must sometimes occur that something is missing that accounts for a difference between the Victorian Age and our own. Our patronage of our grandsires, however tolerant, however understanding, is a little too reminiscent of the kind of comment that private schoolboys pass, among themselves, on old Fatty, the form-master, or even—with bated breath—on the Presence in the Study. After all, the Victorians did achieve things that make an attitude of patronage towards them seem a trifle lacking in humour. In the Crystal Palaces of some Bowdlerised Utopia, it may

be that a committee of Eminent Victorians is earnestly and voluminously attempting to account for a certain dearth of Eminent Georgians. And the Georgians agree, to the extent of proclaiming that the Great Man business went out of date with the great Queen. It is human, if not very convincing, to add that there never were any great men.

And yet we, the Post-Victorians, cannot help feeling that the Victorian giants ought to be—even if they are not—the veriest pigmies in comparison with ourselves. In so many ways we have progressed beyond them. Our standards of taste and criticism are indisputably higher. The veriest tyro among us can go through their works as a schoolmaster corrects the papers shown up by his boys. If we cannot produce a Dickens, we should be ashamed to shed tears over Little Nell, and if Sir William Watson's comparison with Tennyson:

“Here was a bard shall outlive you all,”

is even more obviously applicable to the poets of our day than those of the last generation, it does not need a poet to make merry over the Idylls of the Prince Consort Arthur. In surveying the stature of these giants, we cannot help feeling as if, in Tennyson's own words:

“What should not have been, had been,”

and are ready to cheer anybody who will inform us that these awful figures, looming through the mists of time, are no more than a row of superannuated windmills.

Unless, therefore, we are to fall back upon this palpably disingenuous evasion of the whole difficulty, we are driven

to seek for some element of genius which the Victorians must have possessed in abundant enough measure to compensate for their lack of its more obvious adornments. It is to the very immensity, or—if we prefer to express it so—the solidity of their achievement, that we must look for a solution. For the essential element in all genius, that which distinguishes the master from the dilettante, is nothing more nor less than the power of concentration, the ability to keep any creative idea in the mind at a steady white heat until thought is crowned by achievement. It is what Napoleon was trying to express when he defined genius as the infinite capacity for taking pains. He would have come nearer the mark had he defined it as the art of turning dreams into realities. Many of us have had a dream in which we have imagined ourselves achieving masterpieces of art or literature, with inspired ease. Sometimes we are able to capture, on waking, some fragment of bathos that was the admired product of our *afflatus*. That is an extreme instance of the capacity for dreaming dreams, without any concentration whatever for their realisation.

Every race is not to the swift, nor is it always the artistic temperament that fathers the greatest art. We have all of us known the youth whose lyrics or water-colours gave promise of a career that never got further than a drawing-room prettiness, while some more stolid-seeming competitor was bearing off the palm. It has been a perpetual subject of wonder that the Celtic peoples, whose very speech brims over into poetry, have yet not even been able to produce a Shelley or a Keats—let alone a Shakespeare. The deliberate and earnest Saxon excels in that

faculty of concentration without which even brilliance is of no avail. And so it was with the Victorians. We laugh them to scorn on account of their earnestness, and yet it is by virtue of this very earnestness that their greatest are sitting where so few of ours can aspire to soar.

It is our custom, in making out our own case against the Victorians, to put our finger, with a gesture of triumphant finality, on the very source of their achievement. They were quite ludicrously in earnest; they took themselves with portentous seriousness. They were also moral, and not content with moralising their own conduct, they must needs do the same to their art and literature. All of which we have been taught to regard as the lowest depth of Philistinism. And no doubt our verdict is the expression of a half truth. Novels with a moral turn out, on analysis, to be profoundly immoral; buildings with a moral may offend the eye without elevating the soul; men with a moral are not infrequently of the breed of Holy Willy. And yet, when all this is taken into account, it remains profoundly true that not only human personality, but its outward expression in art, thrives in direct proportion to its morality.

For, if we consider the matter closely enough, morality turns out to be one aspect of the sovereign faculty of concentration. The moral man is he who is capable of concentrating his will invincibly on what he takes to be good. "*Tenax propositi*," tenacious of purpose, is what best describes him. The execution of that vast design on the roof of the Sistine Chapel, the completion of the Choral Symphony, of the Divine and the Human Comedy, were, in the highest degree, moral acts. It is not

only the quantity of work that counts, but its quality, its intensity, its constancy to the highest ideal. "Be ye perfect," is the first and great commandment to every artist, "even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

Immoral, by this reckoning, will be the work that is turned out, not for its own sake, but for what it will fetch in the way of money or reputation. The smart journalese article that is dashed off to order; the sermon of conventional platitudes strung together; the review designed to do a good turn to a friend or to "dust the jacket" of a rival; the novel which, instead of developing the truth of a situation, wrenches it to point a conventional moral—these are acts, not of morality, but of prostitution, whose heinousness must be judged according to the comparative value we set on the body and the soul.

To say without qualification that the Victorians were moral, would be to imply that they fell not far short of perfection. It would, however, be true to say that—in so far as we can generalise about their dominant middle-class—it did most earnestly seek and ensue after morality, according to its lights, and that though some of these lights may have been as false as those hung out by wreckers, it is perhaps better to concentrate upon an imperfect ideal, than to have no steady ideal at all.

The whole training and circumstances of the middle class, in the early part of the nineteenth century, were calculated to create and foster the habit of concentration. The stress of a competition, fierce beyond all precedent, kept its nose to the grindstone. Leisure was a luxury only to be attained by those few of its members who were able, and willing, to retire on their fortunes. And herein the

middle class differed most from those landed gentlemen whose rents lifted them above all anxiety for the future, and who sometimes gambled away their fortunes in sheer wantonness. To Matthew Arnold's sensitive, bourgeois soul, there was something actually distressing in the idea of Byron's writing with "the careless ease of a man of quality," but he glows with a genuine moral exaltation in recording the immense amount of work that Sainte-Beuve put into each of his *Causeries*. For Matthew Arnold and the self-helping Mr. Smiles were caste brothers under their skin.

Not only his environment, but his religion, provided the Ten Pound Householder with schooling in concentration. He and his Ten Pound House did most emphatically serve the Lord, and the Lord was as great a lover of work for its own sake, as He was a contemner of labour-wasting joy.

"How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour!"

were words that every child was forced to remember, together with the jingle about the bee's unedifying foil, the sluggard, who indulged in dreams, and was tactless enough to confide them to Doctor Watts. As for Wesley, his educational theory would have been precisely summed up in the lines:

"All work and no play
Makes Jack a holy boy,"

which James Mill would doubtless have amended to "a perfect little utilitarian philosopher."

The cult of work soon got detached from its religious moorings, and became a gospel of its own, on both sides of the Atlantic. Emerson gave it its most uncompromising expression when he made the whole of human wisdom to culminate in the dictum that time was never lost that was spent in work. His friend, Carlyle, is never tired of proclaiming the sanctity of work, as work, almost irrespective of its quality or purpose. "All work, even cotton spinning, is noble; work is alone noble"—in such words might a master sweep have addressed his apprentice, while lighting a fire to hustle him out of the chimney; so might the sweater have retorted to the songstress of the shirt, with her

"Work, work, work,
And the labour never flags' . . ."

"Work," he might have quoted from the Prophet, "never so Mammonish, mean, *is* in communication with Nature; the real desire to get Work done will lead one more and more to truth."—Work, and not truth, being significantly helmeted with a capital letter.

This cult and practice of work, unlovely as they might be when the object was to gather not honey, but money, all the day, did nevertheless form an effective discipline in concentration. It engendered that peculiar moral earnestness, common to all the great Victorians of the middle class heyday, with the possible exception of Disraeli. It accounts for the solidity and thoroughness of their output. It took more than twenty years of patient and obscure research to produce what is perhaps the crowning achievement of that age, *The Origin of Species*.

Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy* was the work of a long, and invalid, lifetime. The library edition of Ruskin, in 39 huge volumes, would make the reading alone a Herculean task. But the Victorians revelled in vast undertakings. It took Carlyle fourteen years of almost unimaginable drudgery to complete his *Frederick*. It was in 1862 that Browning embarked upon the task of telling the same murder story, in twelve long blank verse poems, from twelve different points of view, and it was in 1869 that the last of his four substantial volumes issued from the press.

Sometimes the task was too vast to be comprehended in one lifetime. If Macaulay had carried out the plan of his History, at the rate it actually took him to write it, it has been calculated * that it would have taken him 150 odd years to complete it. Another similar torso is Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England*. But the marvel is not what the Victorians left unfinished, but what they actually accomplished. The itch for quick intellectual and artistic returns was an accompaniment of modern progress not seriously felt before the *fin de siècle*.

In an age so convinced of the sanctity of labour, there was little corresponding to the modern demand for economy of intellectual effort. The Victorian had a tough mental digestion, and did not expect his food to be dished up to him in highly spiced or tabloid form. He delighted in three-volume novels; in set speeches lasting for hours on end—as when Palmerston held the House spellbound from the dusk of one June day to the dawn of another; in sermons of prodigious length—and I remember one

* By Mr. Cotter Morrison.

famous old Dean who was reputed to have been good for an hour; in leaders of a deliberate and narcotic solemnity, without any vulgar exordium of headlines. Most potent, grave, and reverend signors were the statesmen, divines, editors, headmasters, employers, and persons in any sort of authority and influence in those days. But it was also, inevitably, an age of the most redoubtable bores. Those whose memory goes back far enough, can remember a type of sententious and autobiographical old gentlemen, whose orations commanded a resigned deference that would hardly be obtainable to-day. And what our grandsires had to put up with in the way of minor and perishable literature, can be vaguely realised by a purchase of some of its relics, for a few pence, in a second hand bookshop. The most popular of all forms of mental pabulum was provided by collections of sermons—and such sermons! They must be read to be appreciated, and the experiment is not likely to be repeated.

That the Victorians were moral, consciously and earnestly moral, to an extent scarcely to be paralleled before and certainly not since, will hardly be disputed. They were peculiarly rich in that faculty of concentration that is the indispensable foundation of all morality, and under the influence of a middle class Protestantism that affected those who believed in neither God nor devil this concentrated energy of will was directed to ends believed to be good.

And yet, by a curious paradox, it is just in the field of morals and religion that this age, though most voluminous, is least distinguished. With the exception of Newman, a rebel against the prevailing spirit of his time, there

is hardly such a thing as a religious genius, though there is no lack of talented organisers such as Manning and Wiseman, Pusey and "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce. Even the cold and formal eighteenth century was able to produce a spiritual genius of the first rank in William Law, not to speak of Blake, whose rhymed *Everlasting Gospel* penetrates more deeply into the spirit of Christianity than any formal theological treatise of modern times. Nor is there anything in the Victorian Age comparable to the apostolic genius of the Wesleys, nor any preacher, not even Spurgeon, with the compelling force of a Whitefield. Instead, we have a phenomenal output of dreary books and dreary divines, the spirit not of Assisi or Geneva, but of Barchester Towers.

As for moralists, there is certainly Carlyle, but his grip upon the essentials of morality is so unsure that he is at last reduced to bawling at the top of his voice that might and right are the same thing, and, in a somewhat lower key, implying that the rape of Silesia and the Partition of Poland were by no means discreditable episodes in the career of a hero-king. As for Ruskin, he started as a tiny boy by preaching a sermon on the text, "People be good," and he continued to preach it for the rest of his life. But his moral trumpet, though sonorous, sounds a somewhat uncertain and inconsistent note. What moralist, of this age of morality, approaches the curious insight of Thomas Browne, or the glowing sweetness of Jeremy Taylor, or—in spite of his record—the concentrated wisdom of Bacon's *Essays*? What Victorian parallels have we to:

"Who sweeps a floor as for thy name
Makes that and the action fine,"

or

“He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small,”

or

“Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed?”

The Victorian morality was no doubt solid and genuine, but it was somewhat lacking in inspiration. It was the exact opposite to that of Jesus Christ, with its central message that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you. The Victorian morality did not come from within, but was mainly regarded as a discipline imposed from without. The Lord, whom the Victorians worshipped, was not the Christian Father who is one with His children, but more akin to the Hebrew Jehovah, who imposes His law, and whose relations with men are regulated with the formal precision of a covenant or contract. He was no doubt a Father, but then—we know what Victorian fathers could be.

If we examine a little more closely the moral code of the average respectable citizen, we shall find that it was supported by two pillars, on which was inscribed:

- (1) It pays to be good:
- (2) If you must commit sins, at least don't talk about them.

The first of these flows logically from both main sources of Victorian religion. The aristocratic Deity of the eighteenth century had tactfully tilted the scales so that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished, and if the more bourgeois Lord was a little uncertain about the reward,

His explosive temper was sufficient guarantee of the punishment. Moreover the new voters of the Reformed Franchise were thoroughly imbued with the business instinct. What was the use of a virtue that did not pay? "Just," cries Martin Tupper, "is the everlasting law that hath wedded happiness to virtue!"

It is for this reason that the Victorian divines were so sensitive to any threat of closing or cooling Hell. It was not enough to do good for its own sake; there must be bribes and threats to make virtue as much the result of selfish calculation as the purchase of government stock—that was what a Divine Governor was for, as Paley, whose posthumous reputation as a moralist and theologian was at its height, had long since demonstrated. It was also the reason that such importance was attached to literature, and particularly fiction, being of an improving nature. It would never do if dog were to have his day or Devil his due. If the picture of life given in contemporary novels had passed for gospel among practical men, there is not an insurance company that would have accepted a client without the certificate not only of a doctor, but of a clergyman. Barring the few glorious exceptions, like Becky Sharp, bad characters have bad ends provided for them, and vice must never be allowed to have any agreeable or redeeming features. When Thackeray comes to treat of Her Majesty's royal and lamented Uncle George, the result is not a biography, but an awful warning.

But here arose a difficulty, for it was another dogma of Victorian morality that it was encouraging vice even to acknowledge its existence, or at any rate to present it vividly enough to form a lifelike image of it in the read-

er's mind. You could not be too careful in these matters. The old Marquis of Hertford, for instance, one of the last and raciest of the old Regency school of aristocrats, of whom a Gilbert might have said:

"To hide his guilt he did not plan,
But owned himself a bad old man."

What was to be done with him? He was obviously cut out for an awful example, but—original sin being what it was, and marquises and snobs and lovely houries what they were—might not a too veridical account of his proceedings prove the temptation of Saint Anthony to youths and maidens unfortified by Theban austerities? Thackeray does the job very creditably in *Vanity Fair*; the Marquis of Steyne is an unmitigatedly disgusting old villain, and though we are only allowed to guess vaguely at the conveniences incidental to his connexion with Mrs. Crawley, we have the most vivid possible presentation of the inconveniences of being flung bleeding to the ground by Major Crawley. But then Thackeray, like most of his fellow novelists, aspired to be something more than a mere story-teller. Did not Miss Charlotte Brontë—whom rumour actually credited with being the original Becky to Thackeray's Rochester—liken him to a Hebrew prophet? Though Miss Charlotte's own masterpiece was not found pure in the eyes of a Quarterly Reviewer.

The subject of Victorian prudery has, perhaps, been a little overworked. There was never a time when Englishmen had anything but ridicule for the ineffable refinement of people in Puritan America, who hid in decent

drapery what they called the "limbs" of their tables. And there were successful rebels, even in literature. Surtees succeeded throughout in maintaining a rich level of coarseness and sexual frankness, without the least attempt at being improving. But then the place for the sporting novel was along with *Bell's Life* in the smoking room—if any—out of the official reach of the ladies. But Disraeli, who did write for the drawing room, and was far less the spiritual child of Abraham than of Byron, dared even to present old Lord Hertford in the not wholly unattractive colours of life. Nor did Tennyson himself shrink from exploiting a by no means edifying legend of the seduction of a doddering old magician by a competent young harlot, duly described as such.

But making all allowances, Victorian morality did, to an extent inconceivable nowadays, repose upon the ostrich-like faith that you could best conquer evil by shutting your eyes to its existence. More important than the truth itself was the purity, or rather the respectability, of family life. And the family was a rigidly closed circle, presided over by the Lord, and his deputy, the Paterfamilias, and into that circle not the least suggestion of evil, or carnal affection, or anything unrefined was allowed to penetrate. It was on exactly the same principle that the prince, in Edgar Allan Poe's story, isolated himself with all his courtiers and servants in a well-provisioned palace castle, while the Red Death was wasting the countryside. Even Shakespeare, though the recipient of unmeasured adulation, must be thoroughly scrubbed and disinfected by the Reverend Mr. Bowdler, before being allowed to

pass the guard and stand in the presence of the Young Person.*

A passionate morality would never have suffered these limitations. Christ, as the Pharisees had not been slow to point out, was entirely oblivious to respectability. But the Victorian standard of righteousness approached much more nearly to that of the Pharisees than that of Christ. It was a genuine and potent discipline, but it fell just short of being passionate. "Respectable" was, in fact, the word by which it may best be described, and it was a reign of respectability that the middle class triumph imposed upon society. Not the proudest nobleman could have rebuked an insult to his order with more unforced dignity than Mr. Brownlow, in *Oliver Twist*, in venturing to enquire the name of the magistrate "who offers a gross and unprovoked insult to a respectable person." As an ideal of life, Victorian respectability, with all its limitations, must be owned, when judged by its fruits, to be at least worthy of respect.

It is easy for us, with our more accommodating standards, to see the chinks in the armour of righteousness wherewith our grandsires encased themselves. It is less easy for us to realise its strength. If the accepted moral code was imperfect, lacking in profundity, lacking in comprehensiveness, and above all, lacking in passion and spontaneity, it was at least held with undisputing faith. On this point there was no difference between Christian

* Not so Moses, whose alleged account of Judah's sons and Lot's daughters was thrust, in the Family Bible, under the most virginal noses.

and unbeliever. Tennyson's honest doubt did not apply to questions of conduct. Perplexed in faith a man might be, provided he were pure in deeds.

Even an imperfect and formal morality, with faith and zeal to back it, is capable of working miracles. And the age of middle class ascendancy was whole-heartedly moral. There was never a time when men and women were so much in earnest, when they took themselves and their mission in life so seriously. It was a seriousness too often impervious to humour, and hardening into spiritual pride. But it did produce a concentration of energy that made the Victorian Age not only fruitful, but also, in a sense, heroic.

CHAPTER XV

THE CULT OF THE DOUBLE BED

IF you had chanced to broach the subject of morality in the fifties, you would probably have been informed, in no uncertain terms, that such subjects were not discussed in refined society. For then, as now, most people associated the word with that branch of conduct that is concerned with the relations of the sexes. And indeed, Victorianism itself is connected in the average mind with crinolines and Mrs. Grundy, with bread-and-butter misses and submissive wives, in short, with the sexual life of the age.

This is not quite so indefensible as it might seem at the first blush. For there is a sense in which it would be true to say that the sexual aspect of life, if not all-important, was at least the most important. The Victorian Age was distinguished by the ever-increasing quantity of the things it produced. But the historian of a future age, who can see to the close of the story, may perhaps decide that the production of men was even more revolutionary in its effects than that of things, and that the vital statistics were not those of imports and exports, but of a population mounting every year above the possibility of maintenance, except from overseas. The workshop of the world was gambling more and more recklessly on the prospect of keeping its custom for all time. No wonder that the Victorians made work into a gospel!

"Produce! produce!" was the cry, not only of its prophet Carlyle, but of the age itself. But the output of the factory was less important, in the long run, than that of the double bed.

True to their instinct of concentrating on immediate necessities, and ignoring deeper issues, the Victorians were careful to invest the marriage chamber with a taboo of absolute secrecy. Gone was the time when the bridal bed had been covered with flowers, and the guests had escorted the happy pair in triumph thither. That room was now the Holy of Holies in the vast temple of middle class domesticity. All ways led thither. Paterfamilias toiled, wages were kept down and rents screwed up, in order that an economic basis might be provided for the business of refined propagation, and the most attractive partner secured. "Mamma" toiled and intrigued, with indefatigable zeal, that she might see the last of her brood of daughters pass beyond her ken and authority into the Unmentionable. To attain this consummation, innocent Flora exposed a virginal bosom, and pinched and expanded her contour to hint at charms that nature never owned. To provide a safety valve for masculine animal instincts, that were not allowed to exist save behind those portals of silence, an outer darkness was provided, peopled by beings whose very existence it would have been unrefined for Flora to have suspected, and into which Charles and Reginald faded away at discreet intervals.

It was the same with fiction. The happy ending was the one in which the chamber door closed, for the first time, behind the hero and heroine. "Further," as Mr.

Robert Montgomery would have said, "the red and raging eye of imagination is forbidden to pry." And yet one wonders, sometimes, how beings so apparently devoid of fleshly passion as the heroes and heroines of most Victorian novels, could ever have effected the transition from courtship to parenthood. It has been asserted that the Brownings—two of the greatest lovers, in all conscience, that ever lived—never saw each other naked. Evidence on such a point must be hard to collect, and the statement itself may conceivably have originated in a deduction from an article of Victorian faith, that the Holy of Holies is as proper within as without.

By fearful sanctions was this hymeneal propriety defended. Once the goal was attained and the door closed, the destiny of Flora was regarded as finally settled. Whatever happened, there was no appeal and no escape. For a woman to divorce her husband was next door to impossible. For her to leave him was social ruin. One of the rare gleams of light on these inner mysteries is provided by a dreadful story, in Lady Cardigan's *Recollections*, about a certain Lord Ward, whose pleasure it was to gloat on the spectacle of his young wife's naked body, covered with jewels, against the background provided by a black satin-covered couch. In terror and disgust the poor girl appealed to her parents, at whose behest she had gone to the altar, and who had probably trained her to notions of the most fastidious prudery, only to be told to conform to her husband's entirely legitimate desires. The sequel is perhaps not surprising, of her betraying her marriage vows in good earnest, being publicly expelled from her husband's and rejected from her

parents' house in the small hours of the morning, and dying of the consequent miscarriage. The last scene of all—as ghoulish as anything dreamed of by a Poe or a Bram Stoker—may be read in the original by those with strong enough nerves. There was a grimness, as of Hell itself, beneath the veneer of Victorian gentility.

For however gentle her manners might be, the Victorian woman had no pity either for herself or her sex when vital issues were at stake. She, who produced the men while man was producing the things, was instinctively conscious of the importance of her function. Her sphere was the home, and there was never a time when the home had played such an important part in the social system. The eighteenth century aristocracy had been inclined to see something a little vulgar in too strenuous a domesticity. But the middle class flaunted its domesticity in the light of day, and imposed its standards on the country as soon as it got into the saddle.

The cult of the home was all-pervading. It was the theme of unlimited sentimentality. No song more exactly hit off the taste of the time than "*Home, Sweet Home.*" Eliza Cook defied the whole world to blame her for loving an old arm-chair. Tennyson moved countless readers to tears with the story of a marital tiff healed over a child's grave. Mrs. Hemans gave a highly coloured account of the homes of England, from the "stately homes," with their proper accompaniment of ancestral trees, deer, swans, and streams, to the cottage homes where

"Fearless . . . the lowly sleep
As the bird beneath their eaves."

It is a time when Family Prayers, Family Bibles, Family Shakespeares, Household Words, Home Chat, Home Notes, Family This, and Home That, are constantly *en evidence*. And humour, instead of running to the mock heroic, as in the previous century of classical tradition, now goes to the kitchen and the nursery for its sustenance. Even Ruskin, who was inclined to look on all humour with grave suspicion, quite purred over his Rose's nickname for him of Saint Crumpet, and Herbert Spencer's awful and solitary attempt at a joke was on the subject of chops. Thackeray was no doubt considered irresistibly funny when he described a lady's court dress as being trimmed with bouquets of Brussels sprouts, and of her mother having a muffin for a stomacher. Indeed it was a safe lead for a would-be funny man to introduce some such word as muffin, crumpet, onion, caudle, pap, warming pan or rolling pin, into his discourse, for success to be assured. Parody was largely a mechanical grind of interlarding romance, of the high-flown kind so popular in the drawing-room, with those humble, necessary terms.

To preserve the home intact, in all its purity and sanctity, was, then, an object of supreme importance in the eyes of the Victorians, and it is merely boorish to twit them with cant for accepting the logical consequences of their belief. To be fruitful and multiply, in spite of the teachings of Mr. Malthus, was a sacred duty. That was what the marriage union was originally for, and that, too, what the Holy of Holies, the marriage chamber, was for. Though it would have been violating a taboo to have said so, there was probably not a parent in the country who would not, in his or her heart of hearts, have approved

Mr. Shaw's description of marriage, as combining the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity. The double bed, otherwise so obviously inconvenient, is a silent witness to its truth. By the strange inversion of propriety that reigned behind closed doors, any suggestion of substituting two beds for one would have been regarded as not very nice. There are old-fashioned people, even to-day, who have not wholly cast off this prejudice.

But the marriage union meant more to the Victorians than a mere partnership in breeding. The bond between husband and wife was held by them to be of the most inviolable and sacred intimacy, rising above fleshly passion as the flower rises above the manured earth in which it strikes its roots. It was—to adapt a phrase of Burke's—a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. Had the Victorians been habituated to the jargon of the latest psychology, they would have said that carnal affections were meant to be sublimated. Passion was in their view necessary to life, as food is necessary, but the life is more than meat, and food, when it has left the plate, is like passion that has passed the stage of courtship, to be digested in a decent obscurity. For decency is not necessarily hypocritical. The Victorians might have pleaded that their reticence about sex was no more misplaced than the desire of the Greek dramatist to get his killing done “off.” The modern flaunting of passion and sex-appeal would have struck them as not only wicked, but vulgar. To be carnally minded is death.

Nor may we plausibly tax them with cant because they

put a more serious emphasis than is fashionable nowadays upon marital constancy. Their shades might retort with a rather obvious "*tu quoque*" upon the right we are in the habit of claiming to the unconditional fulfilment of our personalities. The Victorians believed that passions ought to be under control, and that self-sacrifice is better than self-indulgence. The marriage vow was not to be lightly broken—to do so was to incur the guilt of treason. There is no more popular target for modern satire than the Arthur of Tennyson's *Guinevere*. The awful sternness with which the King rebukes his unfaithful consort, and the solemnity of his forgiveness, strike the average commentator as the pose of a priggish old cuckold. And yet to judge thus is to show a complete ignorance of the Victorian point of view.

Arthur certainly takes himself and his mission as seriously as men of Tennyson's time were accustomed to do. He was like Thomas Arnold, like Ruskin, like Lord Shaftesbury, a moral idealist, and his ideal was surely one of the noblest ever propounded, one of Christian knight-hood "breaking the heathen" of truth, of honour, of service, of chastity, and of "the maiden passion for a maid," as the spur to

"High thoughts, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

It was all this that Guinevere had undermined by her surrender to that most compelling of lovers, Sir Lancelot du Lake.

"Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others. . . ."

with sin's nemesis,

"Sword and fire,
Red ruin and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea."

The illicit indulgence of passion was, in fact, sin, and its wages death—death, in this instance, to the whole fabric of Christian civilisation that the hero king had built up. The modern point of view, that moral codes are like the proverbial laws of Ireland, and that passion is only guilty when repressed, may claim to be more advanced, or—what is often the same thing—more primitive, than that of the Victorians. But it is hard to pour scorn upon poor Arthur for not having anticipated, or reverted to, it.

Carlyle had shown a more than Tennysonian austerity in endorsing that of Dante towards Paolo and Francesca:

"Strange to think; Dante was the friend of this poor Francesca's father; Francesca herself may have sat upon the Poet's knee, as a bright innocent little child. Infinite pity, yet also infinite rigour of law: it is so Nature is made; it is so Dante discerned that she was made. What a paltry notion is that of his *Divine Comedy's* being a poor impotent terrestrial libel; putting those into Hell upon whom he could not be avenged on earth! I suppose if ever pity, tender as a mother's, was in the heart of any man, it was in Dante's. But a man who does not

know rigour cannot pity either. His very pity will be cowardly, egoistic—sentimentality or little better.”

The Victorians could not conceive of a happy ending to vice. It might be possible, by an heroic stretch of toleration, to extend Christian pity to the fallen but repentant fair, but to suggest that forbidden fruit could produce anything but violent indigestion would have been to constitute oneself an enemy of society. If a wife left her husband, it was assumed that this could only be with a blackguard of the deepest dye and the longest Dundrearys, who would shortly abandon her, penniless, to the Thames or the schoolroom. The classic instance of this is *East Lynne*. In *Bleak House*, though Lady Dedlock is allowed to flourish for a while, it is only that the justice of the Lord and Dickens may fall on her more awfully in the end. Wherever you look, whether in fiction, or journalism, or melodrama, you find not the least shadow of doubt that punishment follows the violation of sexual taboos—at any rate by the female—as inevitably as night follows day. If you want the view of the sixties in a nutshell, it may be studied in the first series of *Echo* cartoons, one of which is called *The Husband's Friend*, in which the tragic story is depicted, starting with the innocent girl, dandling, under the approving glances of her father, a brother hardly larger than her *chignon*, and proceeding, through philandering, elopement by the “Night Mail North,” and divorce, to the final scene on the parapet of the New Embankment:

“Thus in her misery murmured one, for whom
The happiness of life had utter end.
Say, to what fate would rigorous justice doom
Her husband's friend?”

Such was the stern side of Victorian family life, and that it could be not only stern, but ugly and cruel, is not to be denied. Poor Lady Ward was certainly not the only wife who found that the Holy of Holies was a nightly torture chamber, from which the only escape was into the outer darkness of social ruin. The bride in *Locksley Hall*, dutifully tender to a boorish husband, was probably typical of thousands. Moreover the Lord, still brooding upon the peccadillo of the first woman, was inclined to claim as His due a certain amount of suffering from all the succeeding ones. When anæsthetics first came in, there were many husbands, and even some doctors, who were as much scandalised at the idea of mitigating the agonies of childbed, as a Carthaginian priest might have been at that of painting the hands of Moloch instead of red-heating them for the reception of infants. And however romantically chivalrous a husband might be in other ways, he was the most austere task-master in exacting the punctual succession of children that so often overtaxed his wife's strength, and brought on premature age, or death.

But there is no reason to believe that there was any general desire on the part of women to shirk this essential of what was then conceived to be their duty. The Queen herself set the example, and there is something heroic in her submitting, amidst all the cares of state, to be the bearer of nine children. If it was improper to talk about these obligations of marriage, it would have been grossly improper to default from them, and the woman who attempted to do so would certainly have got short shrift from her sex.

But if there was austerity in the Victorian conception of the marriage bond, there was a deep and compensating tenderness. Never was there a time, in European history, when married love was held in such honour, or when it was the theme of such lofty idealism. Mixed with this idealism there was naturally a great deal of bathos and not unpleasing sentiment of the Darby and Joan order, as in the following verse, from an old *Family Economist*:

“Though morning’s early splendour
 May rapture’s thrill impart,
 The vesper hour, more tender,
 Sinks deeper in the heart. . . .
 E’en age’s weary weather
 Inspires no thought of gloom,
 In hearts that share together
 Hopes of bliss beyond the tomb.”

To pass from the sentimental to the sublime, there was never a more splendid pæan of Love triumphant over Death than Browning’s line to his dead wife, beginning:

‘O lyric Love, half angel, and half bird,
 And all a wonder and a wild desire!’

A more serene and philosophic note is struck by Coventry Patmore’s

“Why, having won her, do I woo?”

and his contrast of wedded love with other human affections, that cloy with satiety:

“But truly my delight was more
In her to whom I’m bound for aye
Yesterday than the day before
And more to-day than yesterday.”

No less lofty analogy will suffice Patmore for wedded love, than that of Christ for the Church.

He was, in fact, the very high priest of the Victorian Hymen, and Mr. Max Beerbohm is hardly caricaturing him when he represents him on one knee before the Rossettis, vehemently preaching that “a teapot is not worshipful for its form and colour, but as a sublime symbol of domesticity.” With an earnestness, humourless even for his age, he was almost capable of doing so, and certainly the sermon could hardly have been more funny than large portions of his poetry, in which he is so imbued with the sanctity of the domestic commonplace that he does not recoil from such lyric heights as:

“I rode to see
The church-restorings; lounged awhile,
And met the Dean; was asked to tea,
And found their cousin, Frederick Graham,
At Honor’s side,”

and a modern reader may be more inclined to laugh than to cry over the delightful idyll—Patmore’s own favourite—describing an engaged couple’s idea of a perfect afternoon’s enjoyment:

“To-day, the mother gave
To urgent pleas, and promise to behave
As she were there, her long-besought consent
To trust Amelia with me to the grave
Where lay my once-betrothed, Millicent,”

an idyll that is punctuated by the penetrating, but unexpectedly cynical observation:

“For dear to maidens are their rivals dead.”

We must dig deep and sift patiently for the gold amid the churchyard soil of Patmore's poems, and it is not wholly inappropriate that the philosopher bard of Victorian love should also be the producer of so much Victorian bathos, for the two are not infrequently found in conjunction.

To most people the proof of the pudding will not be the menu, but the eating, and it can hardly be denied that the married lives of Victorians were, in an extraordinary number of instances, crowned with a happiness that no dreams of romance could have surpassed. We have already referred to the Brownings, who lived an even greater poem than any they wrote. Whatever differences there were between Gladstone and Disraeli, there was none in the unruffled harmony of their domestic relations. Disraeli had married an elderly, eccentric, and monied widow, but—supreme Romantic as he was—he achieved his supreme romance in that union. “If he had the chance again,” the old lady proudly replied to some impertinent suggestion that her Dizzy had done so for her money, “he would do it for love.” And where is there a more charming spectacle than that of the two aged Gladstones, when they happened to be feeling specially happy, waltzing round the room chorusing:

“A ragamuffin husband and a rantipoling wife,
We'll fiddle it and scrape it through the ups and
downs of life!”

Sir Robert Peel may be classed among the first genuine Victorians by nothing more certainly than his home life. Awkward and ungenial as he appeared to the world, he had no reserves with his Julia, as his many affectionate letters to her bear witness. On the morning that he met with his fatal accident, he was just about to mount his horse, when he called her to him, and said: "Julia, you are not going without wishing me good-bye, or saying those sweet words 'God bless you.'"* So, all unknowing, she pronounced the closing benediction on their love.

John Stuart Mill, who might well have had the last spark of human feeling crushed out of him by his fearful education, and who was so coolly logical to outward seeming, could yet rise almost to poetry in recording his too brief union with the widow of his friend Taylor. "For seven and a half years that blessing was mine; for seven and a half only! I could say nothing that could describe, even in the faintest manner, what that loss was and is. But because I know she would have wished it, I endeavour to make the best of what life I have left, and to work on for her purposes with such diminished strength as can be derived from thoughts of her, and communion with her memory."†

But of all the many triumphs of married love that the Victorian Age affords, none is more conspicuous than that of Victoria herself, and her beloved Prince Albert. Most people would have augured ill from the masterful tone adopted by the young Sovereign in her engaged cor-

* *Private Letters of Sir Robert Peel*, p. 288.

† *Autobiography*, pp. 240-1.

respondence, but once married, she soon elected to submit herself, with queenly humility, to the influence of one who, though a foreigner, was endowed with all the high seriousness of purpose and chastity of life that the Victorians most prized. Those who can derive food for ridicule from her touching constancy to his memory throughout her long widowhood—even to the extent of having his room kept exactly as if he were alive—are not to be envied.

“For love is strong as death. . . .
Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE VICTORIAN WOMAN

MODERN discoveries, in the realm of mind and spirit, often consist in the invention of a new word to define what has been known and practised for generations. Auto-suggestion is one of these dictionary parvenus. The Victorians knew nothing of the word, but they were convinced exponents of the thing. They believed that if you wanted anything to be true, you must go on pretending that it was true. There were certain moral archetypes to which reality had got to conform.

The British soldier, for instance, of the Crimea and Mutiny, had got to stand for a hero of the most improving order, a leonine type—in the mediæval sense—with a strong infusion of Protestant Christianity. That British soldiers should ever show an unwillingness to rush into the jaws of death because “somebody” continued to blunder—though this certainly happened at the Redan—that the British soldier’s drunken propensities, as more than once during the Mutiny, should threaten to bring disaster out of victory, these things were as unmentionable as the possibility that any woman might have a temperamental aversion to children. And the Victorians, to do them justice, knew just how far to go with their pretending. That the soldier was a hero was no reason for denying him the privilege of being lashed to the triangle and tortured, or for trusting him in a responsible

ex-service job, and very little for improving the inhuman conditions of his daily life. The employer, the inn-keeper, the mother of any good-looking wench, might have been more inclined to echo Wellington's "scum of the earth" as a description of those heroes with whom they might be brought into personal contact. But not one of them would have seen anything incongruous in going wild with Tennysonian enthusiasm over the spectacle of a cavalry brigade gratuitously offering itself as a target for artillery, though it would have required extraordinary strength of character and skill in horsemanship for any individual soldier to have shirked his part in that act of criminal lunacy.

And yet the efficacy of such auto-suggestion is on scientific record, and it was perhaps a good thing, in the long run, that the whole nation, from the Queen downwards, should have accepted the civilian bard's rather than the Iron Duke's estimate of Thomas Atkins. The mere fact that he saw himself as a hero, and not as the rough he was, enlisted, probably, through hunger, and disciplined by fear, tended to make him behave like a hero, as he did on the Ridge of Delhi and in the fog at Inkermann. It also induced a few great-hearted souls, like Florence Nightingale and her band of nurses, to give the hero his due of service and sacrifice, and it is the amazing fact that the soldiers, to whom they ministered in the hospital at Scutari, played up, almost without exception, to the part assigned them. In the crowded wards, no less than in the drawing-rooms they had left, these ladies found themselves in the society of gentlemen.

We have taken this instance in order to make it clear

what the Victorian attitude was likely to be towards the reality, not of the barracks, but of the home. It was certainly not going to be one of disinterested observation. There was nothing, in the Victorian view, either good or bad, but thinking made it so. The nation, therefore, that would be saved, must so think of the family as to preserve the correct moral archetypes. As there was a military fiction, so there must be an elaborate and sacred family fiction, which faith would crown with reality.

Accordingly the Victorians got to work with the strenuous evocation of types. We know these types only too well. We have probably seen them in a purer form on the stage, and in the mirror held up to the past by present-day journalism, than the Victorians ever saw them in real life. In fact, if it were not irreverent, we might even suspect the Victorians of having accomplished the highly improper feat of pulling their posterity's legs. There is that portentous figure of the Paterfamilias, the tyrant and terror of his family, whom our fancy naturally endows with a submissive and henlike wife; there is the even more submissive daughter, with her tendency to faint and her virginal simplicity, a type invariably contrasted, by no means to its advantage, with another—scarcely to be described as moral—labelled "the modern girl."

And, in passing, we may be permitted to express our surprise that, even accepting these types as genuine, that drawn of the modern girl should be so much in favour. A girl devoid of tenderness or any unselfish trait, whose solitary intellectual interest is in sex-problems, who is brutally rude to her parents and indecently frank in her

intercourse with men, who ruins her constitution with gin and her complexion with cosmetics, whose plastered lips are foul with oaths, and who has probably parted with her virginity in a week-end cottage at the age of eighteen—this journalese paragon would seem, in many ways, a questionable improvement even on poor, silly Flora. Let me hasten to add that so many modern girls seem to have got into the novels and newspapers, that there are hardly enough left over to stock a small and self-advertising coterie of plutocrats. But one trembles to think what would happen to any contributor to a society journal, who let it out that there are houses in Mayfair entirely innocent of cocktails, and that in an even greater number of old-fashioned country houses the cult of feminine gin-swigging is thought to be more than a little vulgar.

This digression has a very real bearing on the question of the Victorian woman. For if we grant that there is every prospect of our hoaxing our grandchildren, it will be easier to believe that our grandparents have played the same trick on us. We can imagine, somewhere about the end of this century, the prize essay, fat with footnotes, proving that such a thing as a gentle or sober young woman was not to be found for at least twenty years after the War, and perhaps the Georgian girl will then be displayed reeling before the footlights—to the accompaniment of such expletives as can be got past the censor—from one man's arms to another. A preposterous caricature, we cry, forgetful that it was we who set the example by first drawing it. And it was the Victorians themselves, with their determination to force truth into

the mould of their proprieties, who started the Victorian woman of our imagining.

Still we must admit that there is just that element of truth in the portrait, that is more misleading than falsehood. For the Victorian girl, at least, knew the part that she was expected to play in the social drama, knew too that her matrimonial chances would very largely depend upon her success in impersonating the prescribed type. If the aggressively manly man of that time happened to prefer a correspondingly womanly woman, the ring was not too dearly bought at the price of playing up to his protective instincts. There would be time enough, once the partnership was sealed, for Charles, as well as Flora, to make trial of whatever difference there might be between polite fiction and reality.

Those of our contemporaries who repeat so blandly the commonplaces about the Victorian woman, are perhaps too much biased subconsciously by a version so favourable to modern self-esteem, to test their theory very severely. If they did, it is possible that they might find a certain difficulty in making all the facts hang together. We are, for instance, perpetually having it drummed in upon us that the Victorian woman, compared with the modern variety, was hopelessly inferior physically and intellectually, her status relatively servile, and her usefulness bounded by such futilities as working cross-stitch—though even this, one would imagine, was no less productive an occupation than the cutting of divots. How does this square with the fact that the mid years of the nineteenth century in England were graced by the most brilliant galaxy of feminine genius that has adorned any

age or country? Where, even beneath the beams of the Roi Soleil or amid the glitter of the Quattrocento, will you find such a conjunction as that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the two great Brontës, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, Florence Nightingale, Octavia Hill and—many would be inclined to add—the Queen herself? Would any candid apologist for modern femininity, with its votes and emancipation, undertake to produce a contemporary list to compare with it? To put one down in black and white would be so cruel as to fall not far short of libel on the selected champions.

And then, again, are not we apt to fix our attention, a little too exclusively, on those darlings in poke bonnets and crinolines, who look so charming in the drawings of Leech? Flora we know—or, like Flora's Charles, flatter ourselves we know—but how about Flora's mamma? She is an equally conspicuous figure in the cartoons and literature of the time, and a great deal harder to square with our notions of Victorian womanhood. And behind that formidable figure looms one more formidable still, that of Mamma-in-law, before whom the doughtiest husband must perforce bow his crest.

There is nothing in the fact or fiction of the time to suggest that the usual pose of the wife in the daguerreotype, looking down with an expression of meek devotion into the face of her seated lord, is more than an ironic travesty. At Barchester Palace, there is probably preserved a portrait of Bishop Proudie and his wife in just that attitude. But, if we may trust the pages of *Punch*, or almost any novel of the time, husbands were more inclined to be henpecked than tyrannous. There

was, of course, a good deal of give and take, according to temperament. The Victorian marriage chamber must often have been a battle ground, in which dire woe was the lot of the vanquished. The Reverend Theobald Pontifex, in *The Way of All Flesh*, did, we know, "kill his cat" on the first evening of the honeymoon, and even Mr. Caudle himself, when, on the death of his redoubtable first consort, he married Miss Prettyman, contrived to set up as a domestic bully, though he proved a much less accomplished and convincing nagger than his at last silent Margaret. And we have, in real life, one or two classic upholders of the Fairchild tradition—The Reverend Patrick Brontë, for example, and Mr. Barrett, who became, in his own despite, father-in-law to Robert Browning. Both these champions of masculinity were fortified by intimate association with the Lord, and Mrs. Brontë was as feeble-bodied as Mrs. Barrett seems to have been feeble-spirited.

The methods of the female tyrant are more subtle, and less likely to pass into record. She does not fire off blunderbusses at doors, like Mr. Brontë—it is part of her ironical technique, as exemplified by the great Margaret Caudle, to maintain her pose of the poor defenceless woman. No shorthand reporter has ever been invited to be present at a curtain lecture, that unremitting, persistent, process of will-breaking that must have made the double bed a veritable nightly rack to many a lord and master. But as from the dungeons of the Inquisition, so from that double bed of respectability, no cry is permitted to penetrate to the outer world. The victor does not blazon forth her triumph nor the vanquished pro-

test his shame. So that we have admittedly only indirect evidence to go upon.

That supplied by fiction is overwhelming. One would imagine that the interpreters of daily life would have been naturally biassed—especially those of them who were of the male sex—in favour of so eminently proper an accompaniment of marriage as the subjection of woman. But the facts were evidently too strong. You can hardly find a *Punch* without some joke about the henpecked husband. That Bishop Proudie was not unique in his domestic status is evident from an incident, depicted by Leech, of the awful prelate demanding of the “buttons,”

“Wretched boy, who is it that sees everything that we do, and before whom even I am but as a crushed worm?”

and receiving the reply,

“The missus, my lord.”

The Caudles have their successors in the Naggletons.

Dickens has left us a veritable portrait gallery of masterful wives. Mrs. Wilfer, Mrs. Mantalini, Mrs. Joe Gargery, Mrs. Squeers, Mrs. Bumble, Mrs. McStinger, are hardly the types one would take of poor defenceless creatures. Thackeray has contributed “The Campaigner” and Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, and Disraeli his gentle, but all-managing, Duchess of Bellamont. Meredith may have pleaded for the emancipation of women, but we should like to have seen the tyrant hardy enough to have got much change out of one of his average female char-

acters—Diana, for example, or Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson. Indeed we are positively moved to sympathy by the fate of that ill-starred egotist, Sir Willoughby Patterne, tossed contemptuously by Miss Durham into the arms of Clara, and by Clara precipitated grovelling at the feet of Letitia Dale.

The sheikh type of lover had to wait upon female emancipation for his emergence. No Victorian lady would have condescended to that charming appeal,

“Treat me rough, kid, treat me rough!”

The sheikh's solitary predecessors are the creation of two maiden sisters. But then we cannot help suspecting that Mr. Rochester, like Mr. Caudle, was working off on a convenient victim an inferiority complex, implanted by that Creole wife of his in the days of her sanity. As for Heathcliff, some critics have seen in him the mirror of Emily Brontë's own tameless soul, and, in any case, he had his peer in the first Catherine. If Emily had lived, and married, we do not think, to put it mildly, that the gentleman in question would have succeeded in coming the Heathcliff over her.

But it is not only on fiction that we have to rely in exposing the myth about the Victorian woman being a poor downtrodden thing. There are still many of us whose memory goes back to the nineties, and beyond. They will remember, clearly enough, the generation of old people who were young in the forties, and children at the time of the Queen's accession. They will remember, surely, those majestic and bonneted old ladies, whose very kindness could be more terrifying than the wrath

of those who now fill their arm-chairs. I challenge any one to come forward and declare that he saw in any one of these old ladies the least sign of that submissiveness that is supposed to be the hallmark of Victorian womanhood. Very much the reverse! It was, in fact, far more often the old lady than the old gentleman who had the appearance of ruling the roost. As the bailiff of a certain large estate is said to have remarked of his employers:

"I can always get over Charlie, but I can't do nothing with Carrie."

The supreme representative of this order of Victorian old ladies was the Queen herself, with her innate though not unkindly dignity. Though the remark is generally misunderstood, as applying to some harmless joke, I have good reason for believing that her famous "we are not amused," was really an annihilating snub of an excursion into the *risqué* at her dinner table. It is impossible to believe that anybody can ever have dared to take a liberty with her. But then, with which of those Victorian old ladies would the brightest young person, or even the most pompous old husband, have dared to overstep the line?

There comes back to me, out of those now remote nineties, the memory of a certain dinner party, annually inflicted on such of the local clergy and their wives as were above the suspicion of ritualistic leanings. On this particular occasion the monotony of the subsequent round game was broken by a distinguished legal luminary, who happened to be staying in the house, uttering a loud gasp, and falling back in his chair with the announcement, "This is the beginning of the end!" But the resultant

consternation was allayed as quickly as it had arisen, by the great man's wife, who was engaged in an elderly rubber, calmly commanding, without rising from her chair:

"Pray do not take any notice of him. He has only overeaten himself."

That was the Victorian old lady of real life, self-contained, not to say self-important, to an extent hardly conceivable to-day. And remember, Flora, of the forties—clinging, submissive little Flora—was one and the same person as Great-aunt Florrie, of pious but formidable memory. Even the most inveterate believer in the Victorian legend must sometimes ask himself how this startling transition was ever effected, how the Victorian girl, as we visualise her, ever turned into the Victorian old lady, as we knew her—an evolution far less credible than any associated with name of Darwin, who never expected the leopard to change his spots in the course of one lifetime. And how, for that matter, did the Victorian daughter effect the even more abrupt transition into the Victorian mamma? Can it be that we have been grossly deceived in Flora, and that the darling creature was, in fact, a romantic fiction?

And we have to account for yet another transition—that of the Victorian girl child into Flora. By every account that has come down to us, Victorian children, not excluding girls, were of a rougher and tougher breed than children to-day. The unhappy governess could—and, when her name was Brontë, did—a tale unfold of what we should consider veritable little devils, who delighted in tormenting the governess, or any other inferior animal they could get hold of. From personal accounts

one gleans the same impression. I have heard of children in country houses who used to run, with delight, to watch a pig being killed, and of certain little boys and girls whose strange pastime it was to pay visits to the cottage of the public hangman, a fatherly old gentleman who would fit round their little necks the ropes with which celebrated criminals had been disposed of—and who perhaps could not have been expected to foresee that the young ladies and gentlemen would end by all but hanging their youngest brother. One old lady used to relate how she and her sisters would stand round wasps' nests, and fight the wasps with sticks, considering themselves quite disgraced if they came home unstung. Are we to believe that Flora succeeded in putting off her nature when she put up her hair?

To this extent she changed—that she put away childish things and entered upon the responsibilities of womanhood. And we ought to realise how grave, in the eyes of the Victorians, these responsibilities were. For in an age that would otherwise have run wholly to materialism, women were the guardians of the refinements and graces of life. We have already compared their position with that of the monks and nuns in the Dark Ages. Their standards were formal and imperfect, and their refinement lent itself, not infrequently, to such satire as that embodied in Dickens's Mrs. General, with her recipe for giving a correct, aristocratic form to the lips by the words, "Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prisms." But it was better that there should be even that standard of refinement than none at all,

The young lady appears to have been fully conscious

of her dignity, and her tone towards her brothers was less inclined to be submissive than censorious, the ironical "sir" being employed a good deal in rebuking their supposed lapses from good-breeding. Even speech had to be carefully pruned, long words being preferred to short—thus governesses were reputed to prescribe "narrative" as an obligatory substitute for "tale." At the same time Flora was expected to be skilled in as many kinds of "accomplishments" as her parents could afford to get her taught.

Victorian accomplishments are seldom mentioned nowadays, except in a tone of pitying or amused contempt. This pose is singularly disingenuous on the part of those whose business it is to extol the glorious freedom of the modern young woman, whose accomplishments—by their account, at any rate,—lie more in the direction of terrorising pedestrians on the high road and compounding symphonies on the theme of gin. Indeed the Joy Flapper-ton or Miss Mai Fair in the newspapers are distinguished by nothing so much as their flaunting contempt of brains. If one of them is told of a famous conductor, she will ask what tram he is on. If she visits a solicitor—an extremely probable contingency—she will twit him with the dulness of his library, and suggest an Edgar Wallace or two. Poor Flora, with her music, her water-colours, her fancy needlework, her fretwork carpentry and poker work, may surely claim to have been as attractive, and even as useful a member of society.

But we are always being told that these accomplishments were quite trivial, and resulted in nothing good.

Even if they had merely led to the infusion of some prettiness and harmony into the drab materialism of the Victorian struggle for the main chance, one would have thought that their existence was sufficiently justified. But the legend that the Victorian woman was a mere trifler had never the least warrant, except in the modern prejudice that a deliberately womanly woman must needs be a fool. Those ladies in crinolines were, in fact, as hard and earnest workers as the gentlemen in frock coats, and apart from its extraordinary outcrop of feminine genius, the age was adorned by countless women of distinguished culture and rich attainments, women like Mrs. Haldane, the mother of the statesman, Lady Dorothy Nevill, Jane Welsh Carlyle, Mrs. Potter, mother of Mrs. Beatrice Webb—but one could go on prolonging the list for pages.

We must not forget the time and energy that Victorian women put into what were known as “good works.” Some of them, no doubt, became rampant busybodies, of the type satirised by Dickens in Mrs. Jellyby, with her overwhelming interest in the affairs of Borrioboola Gha. But there were others, like Mary Carpenter, Josephine Butler, “Sister Dora,” and Octavia Hill, who must have exercised an untold influence for good. And in every parish there were those who devoted themselves, with unostentatious zeal, to ameliorating, according to their lights, the hard lot of the poor. No Victorian would have dreamed of frowning on such womanly activities as these. Florence Nightingale was one of many Victorian women with the instinct for social service—she was only peculiar by virtue of her genius and opportunity.

And she had no difficulty in finding, among the delicate ladies of her class, recruits for the heroic adventure of the Black Sea hospitals.

Of what the Victorian woman was capable will best be illustrated by one concrete instance, of three ladies who in no way aspired to intellectual distinction or moved in intellectual circles, but held to the strictest tradition of Victorian, Low-church domesticity. I refer to the three daughters of the Earl of Abergavenny, father of the first Marquis. The extent and skill of their craftsmanship must have been amazing, to judge by its results. In Birling Church, in Kent, there is a tall and elaborate font cover, which must often have been mistaken for fifteenth century carving, but which—as an old photograph remains to testify—was the work of their hands. They also succeeded in designing a stained-glass window, with their mother depicted in the not inappropriate rôle of Dorcas, and the effect is at least more pleasing than that of the ordinary glass of the period. There seems to have been scarcely any sort of ornamental furniture that they were incapable of constructing. Marquetric, poker-work, inlay, woodcarving, held no mysteries for them. A particularly fine specimen of their handiwork is an ebony cabinet, set with stones, which would probably now command a respectable price, in spite of its unfashionable period. All were competent painters, and one of them, Lady Augusta, a portraitist of real distinction in oils. They were, besides, fearless horsewomen, and the eldest of them, by great courage and presence of mind, once averted what looked like being a fatal carriage accident. They were untiring women of affairs, and the seaside

resort of Llandudno is a monument to the foresight and enterprise of Lady Augusta, who, when left a young widow, with the fortunes of an infant heir in her keeping, saw and realised the possibilities of what was then the haunt not of trippers, but of snipe. The last survivor of the trio, Lady Isabel, retained all her faculties and power of work at the age of 84, sitting bolt upright all the morning at her desk transacting the business of her estate and writing innumerable letters, until the week of her death.

I cite this example, which I believe that many readers will be able to parallel from their own experience, not as a case of outstanding genius, but as typical of what the real Victorian woman was and did. The supreme instance of all is furnished by the Queen herself, the most untiring worker in that age of work, and, if not the most considerable, certainly the most representative of its personalities.

We must glance, in passing, at another count in the modern indictment of Victorian womanhood, that of chronic unhealthiness. To a certain extent, no doubt, this accusation would lie equally at the door of either sex, in an age so devoid of modern notions of hygiene. And Flora was no doubt not only a homekeeper, but a window-shutter, and considered that an appearance of ill-health conferred a positive *cachet* upon her. "Mamma," said a little girl somewhere about the middle of the century, "I wish I had rosy cheeks like the little girl we have just passed." "That, my dear," was the reply, "would be extremely unrefined"—this incident is vouched for by the little girl's nephew. And Flora also

indulged in ferocious tightlacing, though probably this was no more harmful than her great-granddaughter's practice of starving herself, in order to plane down any protuberance suggestive of femininity—let alone cigarette-smoking unlimited, and such gin-poisoning of the tissues as journalese mass-suggestion may have caused her to indulge in.

But Flora, though she did not make sport the fetish it is to the modern girl, got a good deal of fun, in an informal way, out of doors. Archery was a great amusement of the time, and a very frivolous and unscientific croquet. For those who could afford it, there was riding—though not often, or seriously, to hounds. And—still in an informal way—there were more strenuous pursuits. Even football had its amazons. This I once heard vouched for by one of them, an old lady of the strictest Victorian school, though how she managed it in crinolines I was not curious enough, at the time, to enquire. There was cricket, with brothers, and skating, and also a forerunner of the paper-chase, known as hare and hounds.

And, with all her errors, the Victorian woman appears to have succeeded admirably in what she, at any rate, regarded as the most important function of womanhood. It was she who bore that generation of robust children whom Du Maurier was so fond of drawing, and whom we still see around us as the hale and evergreen old people of to-day. Whether golf prices and speed records are an adequate substitute for the kind of goods that Flora delivered, raises a controversy that dates, in principle, as far back as the Mother of the Gracchi.

To judge fairly of the Victorian woman, we have to make whatever effort is required to appreciate a standpoint so different from that which has since become fashionable. It was only a very small minority of advanced spirits that desired to see women of the middle or upper classes—for it was a different matter with the factory workers—enter into any sort of direct competition with men. The Queen herself was never more the supreme representative of contemporary feeling, than in her intransigent anti-feminism. Of a lady who advocated women's rights, in the modern sense, she remarked that she ought to be whipped. And those formidable mammas, who knew so well how to maintain their authority in the home, would almost certainly have been solid behind her.

Indeed, if it had been proposed to emancipate women by giving them the right to be dragged away from their homes, and packed into jury boxes along with men, to discuss with them the most indelicate matters, it is pretty certain that Mamma would have put down her foot, and flatly refused to stand any such nonsense. She would have pleaded religion, modesty, and her own defenceless womanhood—and what is more, would have ridden roughshod over the State and its minions, as only a defenceless woman can.

If we turn to Mrs. Ellis, who had a considerable vogue in the forties as a monitress of her fellow women, we shall find it stated, with a bluntness that would hardly be tolerated nowadays, that "women, in their position in life, must be content to be inferior to men; but," she instantly goes on to explain, "as their inferiority consists chiefly in their want of power, this deficiency is abun-

dantly made up to them by their capacity of exercising influence." Woman's strength was, in fact, to be made perfect in weakness—Mrs. Caudle would never have been such a fool as to have met Caudle with his own weapons of blustering violence. As in war, the indirect approach is the most deadly.

In direct competition with man, woman—at any rate in the opinion of most Victorians—labours under a handicap. All the more reason, therefore, for preserving the conditions that enable her to apply the influence, that is her real strength, most effectually. To quit the vantage ground of the home for the hurly-burly of business or professional competition, would, from this standpoint, have been suicidal. It was not only her own battle that she was fighting. Her influence was the most powerful of all factors making for civilisation. As Mrs. Ellis puts it, in her quaint and governess-like diction,

"I ask again whether it is not good, in these practical and busy times, that the Daughters of England should make a fresh effort to retain that high-toned spirituality of character, which has ever been the proudest distinction of their sex, in order that they may possess that influence over the minds of men, that the intellectual and refined alone are capable of maintaining?" *

We do not recognise what a battle it was that the women of England had to fight. The coarseness of male society, as it had been in the days of George IV, and as it was, outside the sphere of female influence, in the early days of Victoria, is something difficult for us to realise. The way in which the Queen, and her Aunt Adelaide

* *The Daughters of England*, p. 133.

before her, had set to work to purge their court from the taint of the Tom and Jerry days, was a labour as heroic as the cleansing of the Augean Stables. Like all drastic reformatations, it was accompanied by much that was regrettable—as when innocent Lady Flora Hastings was thrown to the wolves of respectability. But the urgency of the task was great enough to excuse some incidental harshness and prudery. And the Queen's task was being undertaken by women in countless homes all over England.

In all the domestic literature of the time we are conscious of a world outside the home, where drunkenness, and crude bawdry, and a gross sort of masculine good-fellowship, flourished unchecked. It was to combat this spirit and hold it at arm's length that Flora and her Mamma made their homes into sanctuaries of such refinement as they were capable of conceiving. The old chestnut, about the husband coming home drunk from the club and receiving a wiggling from his wife, typifies what must have been one of the commonest incidents in this battle for civilisation. The quaint and—to our minds—ridiculous taboo about not smoking in the presence of a lady or a clergyman, as it is formulated in a contemporary book of etiquette, is only part of an elaborate technique for keeping the home sacrosanct.

The long day's task was, in the main, crowned by success. In spite of its rampant Mammon-worship, the all-powerful middle-class was acquiring at least the veneer of civilisation, and a great improvement in manners and morals did undoubtedly take place. Drunkenness enormously diminished. Lechery no longer dared to flaunt

itself in the light of day. Kindness to man and beast was slowly, but continuously, on the increase, and a spirit of social service was being developed. The love of the humanities was kept alive, in spite of deplorable, and deteriorating, standards of taste. For all this we have to thank the much-derided wearers of the poke bonnets and crinolines.

To complete even so summary a portrait, there is one touch that needs adding. No true idea of the Victorian woman can be conveyed without reference to her religion. The conjunction of women with the clergy in the cigar taboo was dictated by no arbitrary caprice. For women were the recognised torchbearers of Victorian piety. It was the piety of a hard and narrow religion, a piety so devoid of any intellectual content that Kingsley could in all seriousness perpetrate that unbelievable line,

“Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,”

though most Victorian divines would have thought it equally appropriate had the addressee been “sweet youth.” It was dominated less by love of the Father than fear of the Lord. But it did inculcate an ideal of self-sacrifice. A woman was supposed to find the fulfilment of her personality in living, not for herself, but for others. Even suffering, as we gather from so many pious treatises, might be fraught with the blessedness of a sacrament.

Writing in 1842, Mrs. Ellis put the contrast between what is now the feminine ideal of self-expression and the Victorian one of self-sacrifice, with an exactness that will hardly be questioned by an adherent of either.

“In one case your aim is to secure for yourself all the

advantages you can possibly enjoy, and wait for the satisfaction they produce, before you begin the great business of self-improvement. In the other, you look at your duties first, examine them well, submit yourself without reserve to their claims, and, having made them habitual, reap your reward in that happiness of which no human being can deprive you, and which no earthly event can entirely destroy.

“Is it your intention beyond this to live for yourself or for others? . . .

“Again, is it your aim to live for this world only, or for eternity?” *

* *The Daughters of England*, pp. 4, 5.

CHAPTER XVII

SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION

THE conclusion we have reached about Victorian womanhood will apply with equal force to the Victorian Age—the way to understand it is to comprehend its religious basis. But then the question arises—what do we mean by religion? If we are to mean what the Victorians meant, or what the textbook writers mean to-day, our task would be plain-sailing if rather long-winded, with so many pages for the Oxford Movement, so many for Evangelicalism, perhaps one or two for the Broad Church and Christian Socialism, ending up with something about a conflict between science and religion—about as conceivable a contingency as a twenty round set-to between somebody's eye and his soul.

We have already explained that we shall take religion in the sense of life's spiritual orientation. Or, to put it in another way, it is what, in the last resort, determines the response of man to his environment. It is the kingdom within him of whatever god or spirit or informing principle he may chance to be at one with. Being an attitude of soul, it cannot be bound up with any theory of the universe or any set of intellectual propositions. The life is more than the brain, and religion, being life's informing principle, has the two-fold property of transcending and merging individuality. The savage, being initiated into the cult of his tribal totem, and Christ, seeking

to unite man by love with God and his neighbour, are both alike religious in a sense that "reverend gentlemen disputing about the width of a chasuble's hem" could hardly comprehend.

The Victorian Age was, within certain limits, conspicuously religious. That is to say, it was intensely in earnest. Of all the outstanding personalities of the time, there was scarcely one who was not gravely concerned with his own and his community's standing right with God, or—what amounts to much the same thing—in correct adjustment to reality. But what we have found of Victorian morality applies with equal force to Victorian religion—there was not the sustained white heat of passion that has burned during the great ages of faith, and there was consequently a disinclination to make a reconstruction of life from the foundations upwards, a change in man himself as revolutionary as the change in man's surroundings. The greatest religious genius of all time had warned mankind that new wine could only be put into new bottles. The Victorian way was to examine the old bottles very carefully, and patch them up wherever required. It was probably a more dangerous course than total neglect, for a well-patched old bottle may be depended upon to hold the new wine—for a time.

It is characteristic of each of the two main forms of Victorian orthodoxy, that it was concerned, not with adapting the inner life to the demands of the present, but with making it conform exactly to the standards of the past. The Evangelicals pinned their faith to the letter of the Hebrew Classics, as embodied in the two Testaments, and translated by divines of the Tudor and Jacobean

periods. The new High Church party resurrected the Fathers, and tome after patristic tome dropped heavily from the press to line the shelves of clerical libraries. The wonderful doings of saints were revived and received with a credulity that would have done credit to the monks, whose meals they had once enlivened. The Evangelicals sought to trump the Tractarian ace, by printing what can fairly claim to be the dingiest and stodgiest collection of printed matter on human record, in the shape of the writings of the English Protestant Fathers. It was the extraordinary air of unreality that hung over the clerical controversies of this time that moved the wrath of Carlyle:

“The Builder of this Universe was wise,
He plan’d all souls, all systems, planets, particles:
The Plan he shaped all Worlds and Æons by
Was—Heavens!—Was thy small Nine-and-thirty
Articles.”

The bourgeois revolution accomplished by the Reform Bill had its repercussions on the religious no less than on the secular side of national life. The Church, like the Throne and the Aristocracy, was believed to be in danger from the triumphant Liberalism of men like Brougham. A Parliament of laymen actually did proceed to lay sacrilegious hands upon her, to the extent of pruning away certain minor abuses and ensuring a slightly more equitable distribution of her funds. But if Lord Grey had been Lenin, and Lord Melbourne Trotsky, their proceedings could hardly have caused greater consternation in the common rooms of Oxford Colleges, from whose win-

dows the prospect was viewed in a very different perspective from that of ordinary men. These common rooms contained clerical enthusiasts of curious erudition—and one of ardent genius, John Henry Newman. The situation appeared to them to be one with which the methods of the now dominant Evangelical party were powerless to cope—to come to Jesus was a means of individual salvation, but now it was the Bride of Christ that was in peril. And the leading Evangelicals—no longer outcasts but secure in comfortable benefices—seemed more and more disposed to a reasonable accommodation with the world, the port-bottle, and the Whigs.

One culminating outrage fired the train of ecclesiastical revolution. Catholic Ireland had long been saddled with a staff of Protestant Bishops, who, in the eyes of the immense majority of their flocks, were not only damned heretics, but symbols of a detested tyranny, a perpetual irritant to an open sore. Parliament proposed to reduce the number of these Bishops. ^{Prof.} This, in the eyes of the excellent Mr. Keble, famous as the author of the *Christian Year*, constituted nothing less than an act of national apostasy, and he thundered against it in impassioned terms from the University pulpit. His sermon gave the signal for a new crusade, conducted not by arms, but by tracts and wire-pulling arts of which the average don is a past master.

The new appeal was addressed not so much to the nation at large, as to the clergy. The Anglican parson had not, hitherto, been encouraged to take a very exalted view of his position. As a rule, he enjoyed a comfortable and leisured gentility, second only to that of the squire in

the parish. No doubt the Evangelical impulse had tended to make him take a more serious view of his duties. But now his whole status was to be changed. He was no longer a useful adjunct to the social system, but a Priest, a person set apart and consecrated, armed with awful powers, and, in respect to his office, above all human authority. The first tract, by Newman, is a skilful appeal to that power complex that is latent in most human beings:

"A notion has gone abroad that they can take away your power. They think they have given and can take it away. . . . Enlighten them in this matter. Exalt our Holy Fathers, the Bishops, as the Representatives of the Apostles, and the Angels of the Churches; and magnify your office, as being ordained by them to take part in your ministry."

An appeal to any one to magnify his office seldom falls on deaf ears—least of all, on deaf clerical ears.

The parson was taught to discover not only a new importance, but a new interest in his office. He was invited to exchange the dull Anglican routine—and during the eighteenth century it had become unbelievably dull—for a highly attractive ritual and symbolism. The vista that slowly unfolded itself was one full of colour and variety. A new kind of clerical "shop" began to be talked—albs and chasubles and dalmatics, prevenient grace and auricular confession, became things of vital moment. The fine old mediæval sport of heresy hunting was revived, and the prayer that reverend gentlemen put up at regular intervals for deliverance from envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, was blessed with no very obvious

response. It was not long before the new apostles were thoroughly enjoying themselves in moving heaven and earth in order to hound out of his office a scholarly and inoffensive Professor of Divinity, Dr. Hampden, who was supposed to have conceded a thought too much to the claims of presumptuous reason. The Oxford Evangelicals hit upon the counter offensive device of erecting a pretentious memorial to Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, on a site where these worthies did not happen to have been burnt, the object being to work up a case against the Tractarians by their certain refusal to subscribe. And then, in 1841, one of those events occurred whose full horror it requires a clerical mind to appreciate. The State Churches of England and Prussia combined to set up a bishopric of Jerusalem. The idea of such communion between Christ's followers, on the scene of Christ's passion, was too much for Newman. "It was one of the blows that broke me," he confessed in his *Apologia*.

Preoccupation with trivialities of this kind, when problems of vital import are clamouring for solution, must strike the unbiased observer as nothing short of tragic. For at the back of the Tractarian mind was the sense of a profound need. More and more, since the dawn of the Modern Age, the social organism had tended to become a body without a soul. It was the deliberate intention of the new, Liberal school of thought that it should be so. The State was regarded as a mere device for keeping clear the ring for the struggle of conflicting self-interests. Any collective expression of a common faith or personality, such as the Church had supplied during the Middle Ages, and as Fascism and Bolshevism are attempting, each

in its fashion, to supply to-day, was anathema to thinkers like Macaulay and the Mills, to statesmen like Melbourne and Lord John Russell.

Newman, who possessed incomparably the clearest and most powerful intellect of any Victorian theologian, and who, with the "bright and beautiful" Hurrell Froude, constituted the brains of the movement, formulated the philosophy of Liberalism in a series of very lucid propositions, and his own, by implication, as the exact contrary. He held, like Mussolini and Lenin, no less than Hildebrand and the Schoolmen, that there is such a thing as a national or state conscience, and that the civil power has a positive duty to maintain religious truth, which amounts to saying that its first responsibility is for a nation's spiritual orientation.) No doubt it is open to any one to hold, as the Low Church did of the Catholics, that the religion of Fascist Cæsarism or Bolshevist materialism is that of Anti-Christ, but that would merely prove that the Devil's disciples are going to work on sounder principles than those of God.

The Oxford Movement is a flat contradiction of the then dominant idea that, as Newman put it, "education, periodical literature, railroad travelling, ventilation, drainage, and the arts of life, when fully carried out, serve to make a population moral and happy," or that "utility and expedience are the measure of political duty." (The Evangelicals had laid it down that a man's first duty was to get right with God. The Tractarians went a step further in applying this principle to the community. What should it profit a nation if it were to gain the whole world and lose its own soul?

It is unfortunate that, having laid these foundations, the new apostles could think of nothing to build upon them better than a mediæval edifice, guaranteed correct to style, with stained-glass saints and other theatrical properties to order. No doubt even this was better than nothing. The Church became more alive, and a great deal more attractive and interesting, as a result of the Oxford Movement. But she never even approached the ideal of providing the body of the State with a soul, or of effecting such a spiritual revolution as alone could enable civilisation to survive the results of a material revolution.

In 1845, the Oxford Movement sustained a check that crippled its activities for a generation, in the defection of its two most brilliant intellects, those of Newman and W. G. Ward, to Rome, where, as they had discovered at last, they could alone find the Church of their dreams. They were followed six years later, amongst others, by Henry Edward Manning, a born romantic, without any pretensions to an intellectual grasp like that of Newman. No better illustration of the extent of the average clerical outlook can be afforded than the incident that determined this step. The Bishop of Exeter, whose capacity for finding quarrels in straws was already notorious, hit upon the device, not altogether original, of badgering candidates for livings with inquisitorial questions on points of doctrine. A reverend botanist, of the name of Gorham, whom the Lord Chancellor had presented to a living, was, by this means, discovered to be unsound, in a fashion hardly comprehensible to the lay mind, as to the precise potency of the magic imparted by

process of baptism to squalling babies. A lay court, having neither the competence nor the disposition to comprehend a divine procedure so contrary to human notions of justice as to favour one baby at the expense of another, ended the matter, after a vast amount of expense in lawyers' fees, by deciding, in effect, to consign the good prelate's list of conundrums to the waste paper basket, and allow Mr. Gorham to retire from the limelight into the obscurity of a Devonshire vicarage.

This was the last straw. The stricken Prelate wrote to Manning to the effect that he could no longer communicate *in sacris* with the Archbishop of Canterbury, on account of the latter's complicity (by complying with the law) "in this awful work," and the awfulness of it so worked on Manning's mind, that he shook the dust of Anglicanism from off his feet, and made the best of his way to Rome, in the spirit of the chicken in the fairy story, who left the farmyard to tell the King that the sky had fallen on his poor bald pate. There is nothing in Manning's record that affords us the least warrant for impugning the sincerity of so tragic a conviction.

The conversions to Rome tilted the balance of power decidedly in favour of the Low Church. Its honest Protestants were now able to point out how they had all along warned their fellow Churchmen of the real goal of the Oxford reformers. There was still a formidable amount of anti-Papal feeling, that expressed itself in Fifth of November orgies, and the song demanding a rope and a faggot for the Supreme Pontiff. There was, in fact, a regular anti-Papal scare when, in 1850, the Pope authorised the creation of a Catholic hierarchy for England, but

the Whig Premier, Lord John Russell, fully imbued though he was with the Protestant traditions of his family, was too deeply committed to Whig principles of tolerance to do more than make a harmless demonstration.

Sectarian bigotry, during the generation that followed Newman's secession, reached a pitch of extraordinary bitterness. Though, as the pages of *Punch* bear witness, no insult was too crude to hurl at the Pope, the principal fury of the Evangelicals was reserved for what they regarded as Romanisers within the Anglican fold, or Ritualists, as the High Churchmen now came to be called.

"We know what Ritualism means," cried a certain Reverend George Chute. "It means the defilement of your daughters, the seduction of your wives, and all the other evils that abound on the Continent." Sometimes invective takes the form of poetry:

"This wily, crafty Ritualist,
With cope and incense strong,
This unctuous and bearded priest,
With broidered vestments long. . . .

"Your wives and daughters soon will learn
On him their hopes to rest,
And every feeling overturn
Unless by him expressed."

Sometimes practices that are now part of ordinary ecclesiastical routine, are singled out for special denunciation, as in the crusading appeal from which the following is an extract:

“Let us now make a grand proposition
To unite in a firm opposition,
To do all we can
To get rid of a man
Who favours the Eastward position,”

and ending on the heroic resolve:

“Though we die in the field,
We never will yield,
To this Ritualistic position.”

The fact that issues of this sort could excite such passion in clerical minds, is significant of the religious outlook of the mid-Victorian decades. With the cessation of *Tracts for the Times*, a great and deceptive calm settled on the Church. Never had she seemed to enjoy such unruffled security. The alarm excited by the Whig triumph had passed away; the few reforms that had been forced upon her had served rather to strengthen her position. Society had become respectable, and the broad-brimmed hat of the parson ranked above the “topper” as a symbol of respectability. A genteel infidelity was no longer *à la mode*. The ideal of a Christian gentleman had, even in the highest circles, superseded the polite worldliness of a Chesterfield or Horace Walpole. The Pavilion at Brighton, dismantled and handed over to the Town authorities, was allowed to stand as an awful monument of predeceased naughtiness. Infidelity was in a worse case than vice, because it stood in more need of publicity, and the social taboo upon any tampering with the foundations of Christianity was almost as powerful as that upon the overt recognition of carnal passion.

The foundations of Victorian Christianity were in peculiar need of such strengthening. The Low Church theology was bound up with the letter of Holy Scripture, including that of the Old Testament legends. It was supposed to be literally true that God had created the world in seven days, that He had drowned it for forty, and that a Hebrew General had discounted the importance of the time factor in war by his ability to hold up the solar system. Christianity was made to stand, not on any spiritual support, but on all sorts of "evidences," and inferences from the supposed workings of nature. Had not Paley ransacked all that he knew of science for phenomena that could only be explained as special acts of God? Was not the very absence of any conceivable development of one species out of another sufficient proof that God must have designed and constructed at least two specimens of each type? It amounted to crediting anything that science had as yet failed to explain, to the divine account. But this, when science was explaining more and more things every day, was fraught with obvious peril. One or two outlying positions might be tacitly abandoned—but what if the scientists were to produce evidence of the world having been more than a week old at the creation of Adam, or of the gulf between species being bridgeable? The answer was that respectable scientists did not, and others must not, make such discoveries.

The clergy had no more taste than other Victorians for exploring foundations. So they were content to shut their eyes to ominous signs of the coming storm. Geology was already beginning to take dangerous liberties with the

Mosaic time-table, and in fashionable drawing-rooms they were discussing a book called *Vestiges of Creation*, which, as a young lady in Disraeli's *Tancred* put it, suggested the possibility that we had been fishes and might one day be crows.

Unfortunately, the stimulus of Tractarian opposition had done nothing to relieve the poverty of thought that had been so fatal an accompaniment of the Evangelical movement. Of the vast amount of pious prose that was produced under Low Church and Dissenting auspices during the first half of the Queen's reign, practically nothing has stood the test of time. Most of it is of a kind that the modern educated reader would find it difficult to take seriously. Where now can we find a responsible divine to write such a book as *The Church Before the Flood* by the Rev. John Cumming, D.D.—over 600 pages in length—which accounts for the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice by the discovery that Abel was a Protestant, and points the subsequent tragedy with the moral:

“Be not deceived; what Romanism has made Spain, Italy and Austria, morally and intellectually, it would make Westminster. The Cain mark is upon it.”

Where now would you find a theologian to compose, or a firm to publish, so elephantine a treatise as the *Horæ Apocolyplicæ* of the Rev. E. C. Elliott, in which vast labour and considerable erudition are devoted to proving the Book of Revelation to have been an anti-Papal pamphlet?

Now that family prayers have gone out of fashion, people are beginning to forget the dulness and dreariness of those interminable petitions that were read out morn-

ing and evening by Paterfamilias to the kneeling children and domestics. For the most part, they were inspired by a fear of the Lord that expressed itself in a routine of grovelling self-abasement. They must have been singularly ineffective, for as the week progressed, the household were inevitably destined to sink to depths of villainy that resulted in an appalling catalogue of sins at the stocktaking on Saturday evening, with the certainty that so long as the Family Prayer Book remained in use, the dread process of backsliding was destined to go on, week in, week out, without the faintest hope or chance of amendment.

Particular attention was devoted to the impressionable minds of children, and the output of improving literature for their benefit was enormous. The spirit of Mr. Fairchild was still abroad, though the growing humanitarianism of the age was inclined to lay somewhat less stress upon the inhuman qualities attributed to the Heavenly, even more than to the earthly Father. But a child's nerves must have been tough not to have been permanently affected by the perpetual harping on deathbeds, funerals and other accompaniments of mortality, that was supposed to be peculiarly edifying for the young mind. In juvenile literature the moralising tendency of the Victorians had full scope because—since the effective demand was created by the buyer and not by the reader—there was no incentive to aim at being anything but improving.

To give one instance of the sort of fare provided, we will take an incident from a book of Mrs. Carey Brock's, about some children every episode in whose lives is supposed to illustrate one of the journeyings of the Children

of Israel. A schoolgirl is just beginning to recover from an attack of scarlet fever, and the Doctor has expressly prescribed for her light reading and cheerful talk. But the improving clergyman of the book has gathered from something let fall in her delirium that she has been committing sin—burning a school book—and at all costs he is going to worm it out. Accordingly, no sooner has he got her alone, than he produces his Bible, and after having perused it ominously for some little time, asks if he may read to her. The poor child having made the only possible answer, Mr. Somers, the clergyman in question, opens the attack with a chapter of Hosea, “making the cheek yet paler, the uneasy look yet more uneasy.”

Having produced these desirable symptoms in the patient, he now proceeds to harrow her feelings with a lurid description of God’s wrath and its effects, and having frightened her almost to death, rams home the moral with the words, “it has been thus with you,” after which the sick and trembling child has the confession torn out of her.

But Mr. Somers has not done. “Mr. Somers prayed, but before prayer came a thanksgiving, an earnest thanksgiving,” nor does the torture end even here, for the Bible is produced again, and another chapter read, and another sermon preached, “very faithfully, yet with many comforting words,” about Moses, and the golden calf, and the quails in the wilderness, and sin, and the consequences of sin, until the triumphant consummation is attained, that little Gertrude, who, we are asked to believe, survived the experience, “abhorred herself and repented in dust and ashes.”

That was the light in which God and His ministers were presented to little children, objects of fear, the grown-up person in his most terrifying aspect. Religion was a stern and joyless discipline, and if any element of love entered into it, it was because God would make it exceeding hot for you if you didn't love Him. It was the same with God's House, if we may judge by one of Mrs. Alexander's hymns:

"Little children must be quiet
When to holy Church they go,
They must sit with serious faces,
Must not play nor whisper low,

"For the Church is God's own temple,
Where men go for praise and prayer,
And the great God will not love them
Who forget His presence there."

As for God's day, everything was done to make it one of gloom and boredom for the junior members of pious families. As a shocked and saintly servant girl is made to gasp, in another of Mrs. Brock's Improvers:

"Fun, on a Sunday!"

In many families, not only all amusements, but all books, were prohibited, except those tending directly to edification, and there is a case on record of one heroic old gentleman who used, on Sunday afternoons, when there was no service to occupy the time, to improve it by family readings, at full length, of the Church homilies. It is significant that those who made it their business to root out any sort of pleasure—even that afforded by museums and pic-

ture galleries—on the Sabbath, were usually careful to avoid the word Sunday, which had too obviously cheerful associations, and substitute “The Lord’s Day.” The Lord was not likely to let any day of His be enjoyable to the children of His wrath.

On one subject, at least, the Evangelicals were in agreement with the Ritualists, and indeed, with the Catholics. There could be no question of tampering with Hell. The idea that there could be any limit to the implacability of an all-loving Father was too terrible to be entertained for a moment. Even Jesus was not free from complicity with the Devil and his work of eternal torture. This is quite clearly brought out in *Peep of Day*, a book from which countless thousands of children imbibed their first ideas of religion:

“At last Jesus will sit upon a white throne, and everybody will stand round his [the small “h” is in the original, the capital being doubtless Popish] throne. He will open some books, in which he has written down all the naughty things people have done. God has seen all the naughty things you have done. He can see in the dark as well as in the light, and knows all your naughty thoughts. He will read everything out of his books before the angels that stand round. Yet God will forgive some people, because Christ died upon the cross.”

Only some! And these fortunate few would have to accomplish the feat of loving that blend of Peeping Tom and the Marquis de Sade whom pious evangelists dared to cast for the divine rôle.

“This is what God will do to those who do not love him. God will bind them in chains and put them in a

lake of fire. There they will gnash their teeth and weep and wail forever. God will put Satan in the same place and all the devils. Satan is the father of the wicked, and he and his children shall be tormented for ever. They shall not have one drop of water to cool their burning tongues."

In view of which prospect, what prudent little child could hesitate for a moment about loving so amiable a Father?

But all these performances are put into the shade by the Catholic Father Furniss—a singularly appropriate name for one whose principal title to fame is to have produced the most super-heated and agonising Hell on imaginative record. His sadistic outpourings were for the special benefit of children—hence his title of the Children's Apostle—and no doubt, with the little boys, he must have achieved considerable popularity as a specialist in torture. Certainly no Red Indians could compete for a moment with Father Furniss's God, Saviour, and Devil, who combine to damn a poor little child to everlasting confinement, screaming, stamping, struggling, in a red-hot oven. This is by no means the only form of torture that the good Father is capable of devising for his little friends—perpetually burning suits of clothes, audibly boiling blood and brains, and one divinely neat practical joke, that of half opening the door of a cell wherein a little girl is agonising in eternal solitude on a red-hot floor, and then shutting it again—forever. "Oh, that you could hear the horrible, the fearful scream of that girl!" But why horrible?

There was nothing that aroused orthodox divines to a

greater pitch of fury than the least attempt to put limits to the divine ferocity. Their attitude was that of the military authorities towards the torture of flogging—take away the stimulus of fear, and it would be impossible to keep the rank and file under authority. But thanks to the sturdy individualism of the age, it was impossible to prevent some of the more earnest and thoughtful spirits from using their brains or following the dictates of their hearts. One of these was Charles Kingsley, who, though in no sense a philosopher, had a fund of John Bullish common-sense, and a heart of gold. It was he who pointed out that the use of fire and worms was to set free the elements of decayed and dead matter to enter into other organisms, and that to tax God with perverting it into an instrument of torture was blasphemy. But Kingsley was looked upon as a dangerous firebrand, and his friend, F. D. Maurice, who, though he disclaimed the title of Broad Churchman, held that it was impossible to set limits to God's love, even for defunct sinners, was on that account deprived not only of a professorship of divinity, but one of history, at King's College, London, the Bishop of that diocese having threatened to decline to receive the College certificate as a qualification for examination. But, as we have already seen in the Gorham case, the last word in these matters is not with the Bishops, and it was in 1863 that Lord Chancellor Westbury put an end to a rather similar heresy hunt by "dismissing Hell with costs and taking away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of eternal damnation."

Another form of activity that was gravely disapproved of by those in ecclesiastical authority, was anything tend-

ing to stir up the people. There was a tacit agreement to ignore those unfortunate passages in the Bible that tended to the disadvantage of Dives. When, after the final failure of the Chartist movement, a small group of Christian Socialists, who included Kingsley and Maurice, made a serious but abortive effort to deal with the social problem on Gospel lines, there was much fluttering of clerical dovecotes, and Kingsley's sermon on the message of the Church to labouring men drew on his head a perfect storm of abuse, and an episcopal prohibition against his preaching.

We have so far dealt with the less favourable aspect of Victorian religion, and it must be confessed that—contrary to the popular idea—it is on their religious side that the Victorians are most vulnerable. Their habit of shirking fundamental issues disqualified them from the all-important task of adapting the inner man to the revolution in the outer world. They clung, with passionate obstinacy, to the old traditions and formulas, or when they did reform,

“They fed not on the advancing hours,
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.”

What may be the ultimate consequences to civilisation of this, their great refusal, time will show. Certain it is that their position could only be maintained at the cost of an intellectual impoverishment and spiritual obtuseness, for which the Church had to pay a terrible reckoning, when she found herself committed to a devil's—or donkey's—advocacy, against truth and scientific enquiry.

But when we have allowed for all this, we can freely

pay our tribute to the work accomplished by the various religious bodies within the sphere to which they chose to restrict their activities. For all their narrowness of outlook, the Victorians did, at least, make religion—as they understood it—a leading principle of their lives, and if their religion was more that of the Pharisees than that of Christ, it can at least be added, in the light of modern enquiry, that few indeed have ever lived up to a much higher than the Pharisaic standard.

“Think,” some Victorian shade might say, “of what we did for our own generation, before you tax us with the shortcomings of our posterity.”

Even the cult of the Lord, as practised by the Evangelicals, grotesque and horrible as its basic principles may seem, has a large balance of practical good to its account—at least in England, for we cannot acquit it altogether of responsibility for those two great Imperial tragedies, the Dutch Exodus from the Cape, and the Indian Mutiny. The Lord, though a God of gloom and terror, was also, by a strange paradox, a patron of righteousness.

It had been the early Evangelists who had given the driving force of the enthusiasm to the anti-slavery crusade. It was one of the sternest and most kill-joy of Low Churchmen, Lord Shaftesbury, who did more than any other man of his time to promote the cause of social reform. And there were others, of the same stamp, fighting for the same cause in more restricted fields. For it is a mistake to think of the Evangelical parson as a mere unctuous bigot. Our notions of him are apt to be unconsciously formed on the pattern of Samuel Butler’s hateful clergymen in *The Way of All Flesh*. Theobald Pontifex, one fancies, would have done little credit to any profes-

sion, and as a parson, he exhibits all the worst qualities that tend to flourish on an Evangelical soil. But even by Butler's account, he has the true Victorian capacity for work, and looks after his parish—providing for the material as well as the spiritual needs of his flock—in a way very few eighteenth century parsons would have dreamed of doing. And the Low Church could produce a very different type from that of Theobald. In many a parish, the Parson went about carrying his simple Gospel message into slum and hovel, wearing himself out in the service of his Master and his flock, leaving a memory of which a faint fragrance even now lingers, so long as there are old men who can remember the days—if I may be pardoned for citing names from my own district—of Mr. White of Ryarsh or Mr. Bligh of Birling.

Quite apart from the Low Church, a great change came over the clergy in the first half of the Queen's reign. In the middle of the century, people were already talking of the "old school," comfortable, leisured men of the world, often with scholarly tastes, and not infrequently with an epicurean affection for port. Even before the Queen's accession, this sort of thing was beginning to be frowned upon. In a young lady's letter of 1831, I find the following stricture of the "extremely vulgar and unclerical conversation," of a certain young clergyman, "about . . . the late king at Belvoir Castle, all drunk except some maid-servants and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he was pretty well."

The man who did the most to set a new standard for the clergy was Bishop Wilberforce, or Soapy Sam, a child in intellect—as his attempt to break a lance with Huxley proved him—but, like so many Victorians, a giant for

work. "God," he said, "numbers the Bishop's idle or absent hours," and he laboured tirelessly in his diocese of Winchester to inculcate a high professional standard of clerical duty. His influence was as much felt in the Church as that of Thomas Arnold in the Public Schools. The new type of parson tended continuously to become more of a clerical specialist and less of a country gentleman.

The new High Church party greatly contributed to this growth of specialisation. A technique of saving souls was evolved, on the Catholic model, depending less on violent outbursts of spiritual excitement than that of the Evangelicals, and more on a patient and calculated discipline, under priestly supervision. The routine of a ritualist clergyman's life became complex and exacting beyond anything dreamed of in pre-Victorian times.

When all has been said about the shortcomings of Victorian religion, this at least must be acknowledged, that it did provide a discipline for character of the most potent order. To one text at least the men and women of that time may claim to have been faithful. Whatsoever their hands found to do, they did it with their might. And the many repressions—to use the fashionable modern word—to which they were subjected, did inculcate a faculty of self-denial, an ability to sacrifice the lesser end to the greater, that produced a strength, if not always a sweetness of personality. Whether they were building their house on adequate foundations, or whether it was destined one day to collapse about their children's ears, time would show. For their time it stood, stately and imposing, a landmark to the world.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MORAL INTERIOR

IT is a stock charge to bring against the Victorians that they introduced morality into their art. In other words, they failed to be artistic because they tried to make art moral. And it is perfectly true that, before Swinburne raised this standard of revolt, it would have occurred to hardly anybody to separate art from morality. But even the muse of Swinburne could scarcely have been described as morally neutral. The man was an evangelist, and even if his Gospel was that of Satan, he would doubtless have replied that Satan was in every way a more desirable master than the orthodox Lord. It was when Mr. Whistler delivered his "Ten O'clock," in 1885, that the real separation of art from life, and therefore of art from morality, was proclaimed. And Whistler himself had all the moral fervour, and even some of the fanaticism, of a prophet.

The common accusation against Victorian art misses the real point. The trouble consists not so much in its morality, as in its failure to be moral enough. As long as art remains the expression of life, so long must it continue to express that aspect of life which is called morality. To say that good art need not be moral, is to say that it need not be good. Keats divined that beauty was truth—he might have gone on to add that both were goodness.

The deeper the insight brought to bear on the develop-

ment of art, the more clearly it will be seen that an artist is a moralist working at a white heat of inspiration. Of Dante and Æschylus, of Giotto and Fra Angelico, of Palestrina and Bach, it will hardly be disputed that they were expressing, each through his chosen medium, the highest moral ideas of their time. But to apply our principle universally, we shall have to adopt a wider and less formal conception of morality than that in customary use, one closely akin to that which we have already taken of religion, and, in fact, hardly to be distinguished from it except by difference of emphasis. Religion we have defined as orientation of life, morality we should define as orientation of conduct, and both might be included in the one word direction—vital or spiritual direction.

Christ, in the conventional sense, can scarcely be described as a moralist, and in fact the formal moralists of his own time held him to be the exact opposite. His morality is correctly interpreted by Paul as being one not of the Law, but of the Spirit. The wind bloweth where it listeth—so is every one who is born of that Spirit. Shakespeare, again, was no formal moralist, but the gospel implicit in his work is one of passionate humanity, of pity and loving kindness and all that makes us instinctively think of him as "sweetest Shakespeare." No one, not lacking an ear or a heart, can fail to be penetrated by the moral sublimity of Beethoven's music, though no words would suffice for its translation. The prophets on the roof of the Sistine Chapel are entitled to the style of "moralities" in an even deeper sense than the mediæval guild plays. There is a morality of pure colour, as in the Five Sisters at York, and sermons in stones only become

tedious when we try to put them on paper. In that Trinity, Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, none is greater or less than another, none is before or after another.

But the Victorian morality was of the Law, Pharisaic. It was a discipline of rules, imposed from the outside, and did not well up spontaneously from the depths of the soul. In spite of all his piety and Liberalism, the average Victorian had not the faintest idea of what was meant by the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. He would never have dared trust to his own inspiration, or have allowed any artist to trust to his. In his æsthetic judgments the sentence, as in Looking-glass Jurisprudence, preceded the trial. Art had got to say certain things, and the artist's only choice was in his way of saying them. A formal morality, cold and heavy as a millstone, hung round the muse's neck.

That was the besetting weakness of Victorian art—and we need hardly say that we are taking the word "art" in its widest sense, as including all forms of creative activity. But if its weakness was moral, so also was the strength it derived from the tremendous discipline of concentration and self-denial that was the true source of Victorian greatness. The gospel of work, or of self-help, was more vital to the Victorians than that of love, and this imparts a noticeable bias to their æsthetic valuations. The Victorian political economy was inclined to determine the value of commodities by the amount of work put into them, rather than their use to the consumer. And in judging of a book or a picture, the Victorian liked to feel that he was getting work for his money.

Hence arose a demand for solidity and elaboration, and

a corresponding distrust for any sort of genius that did not obviously consist in an infinite capacity for taking pains. The Victorians dearly loved a plodder. Readers of Dean Farrar's school and university stories will remember the contrasted fates and characters of the brilliant but Satanic Bruce, and that dreadfully stodgy but laborious hero, Julian Home; he will remember how the wooden-headed but pure-hearted Daubeney is allowed to overwork himself to the supreme elevation of a holy and didactic death-bed. The Dean's standards were those of his age. A picture like Frith's *Derby Day* was admired because you could see that Frith had put such a tremendous amount of work into it. It was the same with that manifesto of Pre-Raphaelite principles, Millais's *Ophelia*. Here every leaf, every reed, every flower, even the robin in the background, is painted with the same minute care as if it were intended for a separate masterpiece. Here is full measure, pressed down and running over, to justify every penny of the £798 for which the picture was sold in 1862, and even the £3,000 for which it subsequently passed to Sir Henry Tate.

It was just this question of pictorial economics that was the crux of the famous libel action of Whistler v. Ruskin in 1878. Ruskin's counsel was merely taking his stand on ground common to all good Victorians, when he demanded, concerning one of Whistler's Nocturnes,

"The labour of two days, then, is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?"

and received the annihilating reply,

"No, I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime."

The applause that burst out in court was the death knell

of an ideal. But it was not uninfluenced by the implication that Whistler had sweated for his guineas after all.

It was the same in poetry. It was what convinced the ordinary man about Tennyson, once his fame was finally established, that here at last was something very like the *ne plus ultra* in poetry. Not only did he give you substantial fare for your money, but all the detail was so astonishingly accurate. No man of business instincts would fail to appreciate the advantages of working in a free course of natural history, geology, botany, history, and other useful and entertaining subjects, all up to date and thoroughly reliable, and all in addition to the usual benefits to be derived from the reading of poetry. Contemporary admirers of Tennyson seldom failed to make the most of these prosaic merits. But even Tennyson could not compete with Browning in the minuteness and accurate erudition of his detail.

It was in literature that the Victorians had the most favourable field for the success of their moral discipline. The spoken or written word constitutes the best medium for the expression of formal morality. At the other end of the scale stands inarticulate sound, which speaks direct to the heart, and on which there are no means of imposing formal morality. The Victorians were not able to abandon themselves whole-heartedly enough to their inspiration to make great musicians. The time before the seventies was one of extraordinary barrenness in English music, a barrenness that appears more striking in contrast with the harvest of genius in Germany and Italy. All sorts of theories have been brought forward to account for this, and poor Handel has even been blamed for hav-

ing crushed English music, in the previous century, with his foreign genius. But a people whose deepest instincts forbid them ever quite to let themselves go, ever to trust unreservedly to their inspiration, will never breed musicians.

To a lesser degree this is true of Victorian painting. It would be the merest affectation to belittle the work of the greater Pre-Raphaelites, of Watts, or of that strangely neglected portrait painter, Lucas, but there is something lacking in it that in France is known as "*flair*," and is the power of complete surrender to inspiration, a lust for form and colour that knows no limits of orthodoxy. The Pre-Raphaelites were rebels, but they were Menshevists, and their boldest flights fell short of post-impressionist Bolshevism like that of Cézanne. Such boldness would have been too obnoxious to Victorian respectability. There was a fearful hullabaloo, as it was, over the extremely proper and devout productions of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, for no better reason than that they represented a departure from academic convention. The motto even of the greatest Victorian artists might have been that of the fairy-tale,

"Be bold, be bold, but not too bold,"

and consequently their very greatness lacks something of the divine fire—it is never supremely great.

Nor was supreme greatness a quality that the Victorian public would have appreciated in, or even stood from, those who catered for its æsthetic needs. When, in spite of everything, a great decorative artist like Alfred Stevens

rose among them, he found himself thwarted at every turn—the history of his Wellington Monument at St. Paul's is that of a pearl of great price, cast before swine. On the other hand, work that was pretty without being great, was sure of its reward. The blasphemously smug Christ of Holman Hunt's *Light of the World*, which is in painting what *The Lost Chord* is in music, passed for a work not only of artistic beauty, but of pious elevation. And there is a no greater tragedy in the annals of art, than the sale of Millais's soul for fame and an ultimate baronetcy. Like Lord Leighton, his predecessor in the Presidential chair of the Royal Academy, he has gone down to posterity as an artist of entire respectability, and only one or two of his early works remain to suggest what, under more encouraging circumstances, he might have become. If an age does not always get the art it deserves, it seldom gets more.

In the arts of sculpture, painting, and decoration, we become conscious of an even worse handicap than that of formal morality, one directly arising out of the conditions of a machine age, that of mass commercial production. The commercial motive, in one form or another, has indeed always had its influence on art, since even the craftsmen of the Middle Ages and the dramatists of the Elisabethan theatre were quite alive to the main chance. But there is a joy of creative achievement as well as a desire for material gain, and under the conditions of machine production the balance between the two, the spiritual and the material impulses, is tilted more and more in favour of the latter. There comes to be no more,

if no less, joy, in the making of a chair or a china shepherdess, than in turning out endless quantities of cheap cloth by means of the power loom.

That is looking at the matter from the producer's standpoint. But there is no supply without a corresponding demand, and during the nineteenth century the demand for machine products expands along with the means of supply. The aristocratic civilisation of the eighteenth century had aimed at a life that should be beautiful and dignified, with comparatively little regard for comfort. A man of breeding was expected to be a man of taste, and to impose his cultured ideals not only on his surroundings, but on the very landscape. The beautiful china and furniture of that time were produced to meet the requirements of people with wealth and leisure enough to insist on living exquisitely.

The nineteenth century witnesses a marked decline in upper class taste, accompanied by the rise of a new, and all-powerful bourgeoisie, without any traditions of culture, and so busy competing for the means of life; that they had scant leisure to devote to its graces. The women, who were engaged in so heroic a struggle to make their homes sanctuaries of refinement, were, for the most part, very hard worked themselves, and even if their formal morality, to which art had to conform, had allowed of their accepting so Pagan an ideal as that of the past century, they would have had neither the resources nor the training to realise it. When cheap and specious articles of domestic use were turned out of the new factories, economical housewives naturally jumped at such an opportunity of stocking their homes. A solid, mahogany

cupboard—if one didn't look too closely at the way it was put together—was really quite as genteel as a Chippendale, while the patterns impressed on Messrs. So and So's carpets might be quite correctly copied from the Persian—and what more could you want?

The collapse of English interior decoration was not quite so swift and catastrophic as one would gather from some accounts. The great days of furniture had no doubt come to an end with Sheraton, but the old aristocratic tradition died hard and there was still much to be admired in some of the early Victorian productions. The classic grace of the Empire style still lingered—occasionally one comes across sets of chairs dating from about the thirties, with straight, fluted legs, and damask coverings. A great feature of social life at this time was the round table, at which the younger members of the party would often gather, and perhaps the young ladies' albums would form an excuse for a good deal of sly flirtation, while the old people chatted, or played cards, and turned a Nelson eye to the proceedings. These tables, often of rose- or satin-wood, are charming pieces of furniture, though they witnessed the encroachment of middle-class ideals in an ever-increasing solidity. The pianos, of a similar material, are another graceful relic of the Early Victorian drawing-room.

Not the least distinctive products of this time were the work of the ladies themselves, though it is only recently that this has come back into favour. The best of their needlework merits a higher praise than that of mere ingenuity. And even where it is merely quaint, it is seldom lacking in charm.

There was a great effort to revive the art of furniture making by applying to it the Gothic principles that were becoming fashionable in architecture. As nobody had any particular knowledge of what Gothic furniture had been like, the result was that the backs of chairs became like rose windows, and footstools like tabernacles. Priedieux with plush tops were dumped down, preferably, in the hall, where, if they did not come under the suspicion of popery, some use might be found for them at family prayers, though, as these involved sitting as well as kneeling, the best occupant was a child.

Towards the middle of the century, mechanical production was more and more coming to supersede craftsmanship, and the Victorians seemed to be fast losing both the desire and the capacity to surround themselves with beautiful things. Solidity and pretentiousness were the qualities chiefly aimed at. Everything in the house seemed to be playing a game of pretending to be something else. On the mantelpiece blossomed flowers of wax, in conservatories formed by hideous glass domes. The mirror, or the part of it that was not concealed by draperies, had become a garden for painted flowers. In the fireplace were brazen irons that some child would ruin by putting between the bars. The mania for draping things led to curtains flanking the fire-place, even when a fire was burning, an apparently dangerous practice to which there are *Punch* pictures to testify. In middle class homes appeared that horrid firstfruit of æsthetic standardisation, the oleograph portrait. Plush and horsehair were everywhere *en evidence*.

With the sense of fitness departed that of colour. It

is almost as if our grandparents had been stricken with colour-blindness. In dress and decoration the most hideous discords were received with joy. What the Victorians could put up with in the way of colour may be best seen to-day in their stained glass, which sometimes produces an agonising effect on the unwary visitor. Now that Dean Jenkyn's memorial window at Wells is mercifully removed, I should recommend the judicious iconoclast to devote his first attention to one of the parish churches at St. Alban's, where salmon-pink is joined in unholy wedlock with flaming magenta. But what the Victorians liked even more than this brutal sport of setting colours at each other's throats, was to dispense with them altogether. A reign of universal dinginess set in. The blues and bottle-greens of the dandies darkened into oblivion. The respectability of the age demanded that beneath the top hat all men should look as sober as clergymen—the sole exception being in respect of the almost sacramental ritual of the hunting field. Only young girls were tolerated in colours, and even their plumage steadily declined towards the drab fashions of the seventies.

Nevertheless, the mid-Victorian interior had an unmistakable, if not wholly a pleasant character, of its own, and for that reason even its tasteless solidity is an æsthetic cut above the ghastly resurrectionism that took its place. The idea of "period" decoration was in its Gothic infancy, people at least contrived to put something of themselves into their surroundings, other than an advertisement of their own snobbery. A solid and sober domesticity is in every line, and we might almost say in every pound and hundredweight, of that mahogany and plush furniture.

It is not for the clients of our Chesterfields of perpetual tick, who furnish homes from vans guaranteed not to display the firm's name to the neighbours—it is not for them to chide us for loving our grand-paternal arm-chairs.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL

IT was in architecture that the moralising tendencies of the Victorians had their fullest and most obvious scope, and it was also an art peculiarly subject to the conditions of a machine age. The mass production of buildings, in which beauty and convenience and soundness of construction were ruthlessly sacrificed to cheapness, had accompanied the transformation of human beings into "hands" in the new manufacturing towns. Those who travel out of London, especially by the Southern Railway, may mark some of the worst fruits of Victorianism in the shape of interminable rows of brick and slate boxes, all precisely alike, that seem better fitted to contain Robots than men. In the country you will see somewhat similar rows of very businesslike, plain-brick cottages, that form a queer commentary on the then fashionable sentiment about Merrie England. And yet the building of cottages had once been the occasion for as much display of charm and individuality as that of cathedrals. A new type of architectural shoddy, in the shape of the detached suburban villa, was evolved to meet the genteel and individualist demands of the middle class. We know how the heart of the representative philosopher, Macaulay, would leap up when he beheld a villa in a row.

But when the Victorians talked of architecture, they were not thinking of cottages and villas. For the manual

worker a house was a means of keeping alive; for the office worker it was also a ticket of respectability—only for those who could afford not to work at all was it in any sense a thing of beauty, though even by them it was more often regarded as a thing of importance. The upper class were no longer arbiters of taste, and the putting up of big private houses had almost ceased to be regarded as an art. The architect's sole idea of beautifying a country house was to put it into fancy dress, and French châteaux and Tudor mansions everywhere affronted the landscape with their incredible pretensions.

It was round public, and particularly church architecture, that the enthusiasms and controversies of the time tended to centre. The great Gothic revival, which had started as a rich man's toy, had now gathered irresistible momentum, and the beginning of the Queen's reign witnessed the crowning triumph of its first, or decorative phase, in the erection of the new Houses of Parliament, a building which, though it sets out to match the perpendicular of Henry VII's Chapel over the way, has so distinct a character as almost to give it a style of its own. Associated with Barry, the architect, was the young Welby Pugin, who was shortly to champion a more serious ideal than the glorified picturesqueness of his colleague. For agreeably to the Victorian spirit and the Gothic tradition, architecture was to become not only formally moral, but formally religious.

This was largely the result of the new High Churchmanship. Pugin himself was converted to Catholicism, but he was at one with the Oxford leaders in casting back wistful eyes at the age of faith that had given birth to the

Gothic cathedrals. For with the new life that was given to the Emotional Revival in the thirties, a more serious view began to be taken of the Middle Ages. Even to Sir Walter Scott, these had hardly been more than a splendid pageant, while to lesser writers they had constituted a splendid setting for bogey stories.

But now more exact methods of enquiry were afoot. Historians like Hallam and Palgrave were already beginning to conquer Gothic mysteries by the rule and line of scientific research. And as the Middle Ages came to be more closely studied, it began to be suspected that they might provide the example of a social order to which, by comparison, that of the nineteenth century was as iron to gold. One of the first exponents of this view was Will Cobbett, whose *History of the Protestant Reformation in England* depicted the Protestant Fathers as villains not inferior to Pitt and Castlereagh, and the Reformation as the crime that had changed a good social system to a bad one. Carlyle, instead of indulging in sentimental generalities about the past, unearthed the memoirs of a twelfth century monastic Pepys, and allowed his readers to judge, by that unvarnished account, whether life under a mediæval abbot might not have been fitter for a human being than that dictated by the inhuman conditions of modern competition.

But not even Carlyle's account was so eloquent and convincing an indictment of the present in comparison with the past, as the architect Pugin's *Contrasts*, a book now strangely forgotten. For if Carlyle's method was to let you read for yourself, Pugin allowed you to see. In a series of contrasted drawings, he placed the modern

environment side by side with that of a reconstructed past, a past—on the whole—skilfully and fairly reconstructed. The comparison was devastating. The mediæval treatment of the poor, in almshouses like New Cross, is contrasted with that of the Poor Law Bastilles, the only unfair point in the comparison being that the modern poor house has some of the features of a prison, though this is quite unnecessary to drive home the lesson that to the mediæval Church the poor man had a soul to be cherished, and to the modern Poor Law Commissioners only a carcase to be kept grudgingly alive and then dissected. The beauty of a mediæval town, with its battlements and gables and forest of spires, is contrasted with the spectacle of the same town modernised, with unsightly blocks of factory buildings, a forest, not of spires, but of chimneys, gas cylinders, poky conventicles, and all the accompaniments of utilitarian progress. The contrast of parish churches is cruel, the sugar-loaf affair at the end of Langham Place being put beside St. Mary Redclyffe, at Bristol.

That Pugin foreboded the mass production of imitative architecture, is evident from a delightful frontispiece, advertising a bogus competition—not so very unlike the real thing—for designing “a Church to contain 80,000 sittings, Gothic or Elisabethan, estimate not to exceed £1,500.” Further designs are required for Moorish Fish Markets, Egyptian Marine Villas, Baronial Gin Temples, and so forth, while compo fronts are advertised as ready to be forwarded to all parts of the kingdom by steam conveyance at the shortest notice.

(The notion accordingly gained ground, early in the

forties, of Gothic architecture as the expression in stone of an order of society directly opposed to the materialism and inhumanity of modern conditions. Not only were its buildings good in themselves, but there had been joy in their making. It had been the Gothic ideal that every craftsman should be a creative artist, or, according to the mediæval idea, a microcosmos, a little universe, as complete in itself as God's great universe:

“How each the whole its substance gives!
Each in the other works and lives;
Like heavenly forces rising and descending,
Their golden urns reciprocally lending.”

The high priest of this ideal, though not its originator, was John Ruskin.

To Ruskin, as to Pugin, architecture was the outward and visible expression of a people's soul. In our own age of artistic specialism, public opinion—with the authority of one of our leading architects*—has labelled this belief the biological or some other fallacy. Architecture, and all the other arts, are to be isolated, like smallpox cases, from the main stream of a nation's life—the historian is to have nothing to do with them, unless he likes to tack on a chapter about æsthetic developments, in the consciously colourless style of one who is meddling with other people's business. The stones of Venice are to have no intelligible connection with the life of Venice; her buildings are but the highly technical product of such specialists as the Venetians may have been rich enough

* Mr. Geoffrey Scott in his *The Architecture of Humanism*.

to employ, and are to be judged according to technical standards by technical critics.

To Ruskin, or any of the Gothic revivalists, such a doctrine would have appeared not only stark blasphemy, but a *reductio ad absurdum* of materialism. To them it went without saying that art was the expression of a people's soul, though all of them might not have gone quite as far as Blake's aphorism, that any one can judge of a picture who has not been connoisseured out of existence. No doubt they prejudice their case by narrowness of outlook, and that lack of philosophic grasp that was a peculiar weakness of the Victorians. Ruskin himself, though at his best one of the most inspired writers that have ever held a pen, is, at his worst, one of the most inconsistent and tiresome, and the best and worst are often inextricably mixed up together.

It is not surprising, then, that like the Pre-Raphaelite painters, instead of seeing life, whose expression is art, steadily and whole, he should have taken sides with one period against another, and, in his eagerness to penetrate the soul of Gothic Christianity, have denied any soul at all to the Renaissance. In consequence, the most able of all modern attacks on the Ruskinian standpoint * consists ostensibly of a vindication of Renaissance architecture, a vindication that tacitly accepts Ruskin's indictment of Renaissance art as non-religious and non-moral. And hence the vindication is made to carry, as a necessary consequence, the degradation of art from a spiritual to a technical plane. But it is equally possible to allow Ruskin to have been right in principle, though wrong in failing

* Mr. Geoffrey Scott, *op. cit.*

to see that the human soul fulfils itself in other styles than Gothic, and that periods of art are not the heroes and villains of a historic melodrama.

It must also be remembered that Ruskin was in no sense a supporter, but rather an opponent of the Gothic Revival as it was carried out in practice. This, after 1840, derived its main stimulus from the Oxford Movement. The demand for ritual had naturally led to a demand for churches in which that ritual would have its proper scope and setting. The average church, at the beginning of the thirties, was not much better than an assembly room, with a gallery, as in a theatre, for the riffraff, and, for the gentry, private boxes, sometimes with a fireplace and a back door for unperceived escape. The parson sermonised in a black gown; there was no choir, though perhaps one or two fiddles in the gallery for music. The chancel was quite frequently closed altogether, or turned into a vestry.

Now all this was to be changed. The Churches of England were to be restored, as far as possible, to the functions for which they had been originally intended. Societies at Oxford and Cambridge were formed for studying the principles of Christian architecture, and the mediæval symbolism of which that architecture was the expression.* As a result, practically every church in the country, sooner or later, underwent a restoration, in the course of which a frightful amount of indiscriminate damage was done. Gothic became the only style for new churches, a Gothic more serious in intention than merely

* A good account of this will be found in Mr. Kennedy Clark's *The Gothic Revival*.

decorative experiments like St. Luke's, Chelsea, which had been put up in the early twenties as a counterblast to a Grecian temple-church at St. Pancras.

It is only fair to Ruskin to remember that he had neither part nor lot in this work of restoration. To his mind, restoration was the worst form of destruction, a lie from beginning to end. Rather than restore a dilapidated church, he would have pulled it stone from stone, and constructed a wholly new one with the materials. Fortunately, his was not the deciding voice in the matter, and it is dreadful to think of what would have happened if this heroic principle of his had been put into practice.

The master restorer was a person of very different calibre, Sir Gilbert Scott, the designer of the Albert Memorial, a practical architect, who had served his apprenticeship putting up Poor Law Bastilles, and who—even by the standards of that laborious time—was a Gargantua for work. There is hardly an important Church in the country that does not bear the traces of his handiwork.

Sir Gilbert was not of the stuff of which martyrs, or fanatics, are made. He was a self-made man, with a *flair* for self-advertisement, and quite ready, at a pinch, to let his Gothic principles go by the board rather than lose a good job. But he was also an enthusiast, with a real love and reverence for old buildings, and, looking back on his own career, he can use language as strong as that of Ruskin about the way in which “the country has been, and continues to be, actually devastated with destruction under the name of restoration,” though with charming candour, he admits “that the best of us have been blamable, and that even our conservation has been more or

less destructive." But, considering what would probably have happened but for his intervention, Scott must be allowed to have a balance of good to his account, and to have handled his buildings with a reverence for which we can be grateful.

What the British Philistine was in the habit of doing with his ancient monuments may be seen at Canterbury. Here, during the thirties, the Cathedral was improved by having Lanfranc's beautiful Norman tower at the West End demolished, to make room for a twin to its Decorated sister, and the ruins of St. Augustine's Abbey were converted into an amusement park on the model of Vauxhall. As for the Norman Keep, that was made useful, as a coal shed for the adjoining gasworks. The climax came in 1859, when Wombwell, the menagerie owner, gravely petitioned the Mayor and Corporation to allow him to pull down the West Gate, one of the finest specimens of its kind in Europe, in order to clear a path for his elephants. It is perhaps less amazing that the city fathers should have gravely debated this modest proposal, than that the Mayor should finally have defeated it by his casting vote.*

Nevertheless the Church restorers had this to be said for them—that they were acting in the true spirit of the time in which the churches were built. Nobody in the Middle Ages could have conceived of Ruskin's idea that old buildings "are not ours. They belong partly to those who build them, and partly to the generations of mankind who are to follow us." To the mediæval builders,

* See *Highways and Byways of Kent* by Walter Jerrold, pp. 43-7.

as in a lesser degree to the Oxford and Cambridge reformers of the forties, a church was a church, and not a historical monument, and they had no hesitation in scrapping the whole, or any part of it, as occasion required. It was owing to this that the Middle Ages evolved the harmonious blend of styles that is the chief charm of our old parish churches, instead of leaving them plain Saxon or Norman. Ruskin's position—and that of most people to-day—can only be maintained on the assumption that the churches were alive till the Reformation killed them, and that all we can decently do is to embalm their corpses. And if this be granted, it must surely follow that the faith of Catholic Christianity, the soul to which these churches were once the living bodies, is a thing of the past, and that no movement or revival can reawaken it. It is hard to blame the men of that ostensibly devout time, for their unwillingness to accept so disquieting a conclusion.

As for the recovery, that was to give a new life to English architecture, of the Gothic principle, the results were singularly disappointing. It was not for lack of building—all over the country, and particularly in the swiftly expanding suburbs of great towns, churches sprang from the soil embodying all the most correct principles of the particular period selected, and designed with an erudition of technique to which no mediæval builder could have laid claim. It was simply that the churches refused to come alive. Let us take one of Sir Gilbert Scott's masterpieces, St. Mary Abbots, Kensington. Here you have all the proportions and features of the noblest decorated work—it would be hard to find definite faults,

except just that it is uninteresting. I doubt whether any one regarding or entering it has felt that elevation of soul, that sense of awe and reverence, that the humblest village church so frequently inspires. It has less character about it than that rather preposterous toy put up to St. Luke in the neighbouring borough of Chelsea.

Even worse than the construction was the detail. The essence of Gothic, as Ruskin had conceived of it, was to give scope and joy to each individual craftsman. But Ruskin himself had a sharp lesson as to the meaning of Victorian Gothic, when he, and other intellectuals of the movement, concentrated all their enthusiasm on what was to have been a perfect example of Italian Gothic in the shape of the new Oxford Museum. Not only did the authorities, in that home of culture and mediævalism, deliberately starve the building of the funds necessary for its completion, but they procured the dismissal of an Irish workman, O'Shea, who displayed a truly mediæval genius in the carving of animals. It is pleasing to record that O'Shea had the last and annihilating word in the dispute, by going back to the building, after his dismissal, and chiselling, with furious energy, a festoon of parrots and owls, to represent members of Convocation.

If these things were done by Oxford dons, what could be expected of ordinary parsons, limited as to funds by the tight pockets of subscribers? Pious Victorians, though they might lay up for themselves treasure in Heaven, had sounder business instincts than to put all their eggs into one basket. They wanted to buy religion in the cheapest market, and in consequence created a demand, not for loving and faithful craftsmanship, but for

the large-scale production of shoddy. The furnishing of Victorian churches became every whit as debased a trade as that of Victorian houses. Mawkish saints and smug monarchs smirked out of every niche and shouted from every window. Machine-carved substitutes were ordered down to replace long vanished rood screens. Mouldings and tracery, acanthus leaves and brass eagles, were multiplied with damnable reiteration. In the High and Catholic churches it was worst of all, for there the demand for tawdry imagery and all kinds of ecclesiastical junk was most expansive. The job of turning out such stuff must have been as soulless and mechanical as the product.

No doubt the Gothic Revival did here and there produce results that are not without value, and even at its worst it was—as any tourist by car may ascertain for himself—incapable of sinking to the horrors perpetrated, during this period, in French churches. Truro has a wonderfully good imitation of a Gothic cathedral. The new nave at Bristol has a grandeur that makes it no unworthy associate of the ancient choir. The Catholic Apostolic Church at Gordon Square aspires with something of the authentic mediæval fervour. An exception to the general poverty of Church adornments is occasionally to be found in monumental sculpture, though the best of this falls in the last quarter of the century. Secular buildings, like the Natural History Museum, have a fine, though not always appropriate, swagger, to offset the forfeited dignity and repose of such architecture as that of the British Museum. And the new Law Courts, the most ambitious effort of all, might produce a better impression, if their component members, like the German armies in 1914,

had not got out of control of the Supreme Command and co-ordination with each other.

But after we have made every allowance, we shall find ourselves forced to the reluctant conclusion that the Gothic Revival was a failure, and not a very splendid failure at that. Its advocates founded their case on a simple fallacy of putting the cart before the horse. It was no doubt arguable that the original Gothic had expressed an ideal of civilisation saner and more spiritual than that of *laissez-faire* and devil-take-the-hindmost. But it did not follow that you could revive that civilisation by counterfeiting its effects, nor that such a counterfeit could be mistaken for anything else than what it was. Accordingly we find Ruskin and William Morris, who were, of all the reactionaries to mediævalism, the least bound by specialist limitation of outlook, turning their attention from the reform of art to that of society itself. Ruskin, despite the failure of all his practical schemes, did more than anybody else to bring the all-powerful middle class economics of his time into the hatred, ridicule, and contempt, in which they were destined to founder. His fame as an art critic has been long, and perhaps unjustly, eclipsed, but his dreams of social reform are the dominating realities of modern statesmanship. It is not with some little band of the æsthetic elect, but amid armies of the people, pressing towards the dawn, that his soul goes marching on.

We ask whether, such as it was, the Victorian civilisation could find no artistic outlet more natural than that provided by Gothic architecture, and Pre-Raphaelite painting? No doubt the desire for an escape, into a romantic

dreamland, from the reality of intensive competition, was sincere enough. It was the Victorian decency not to look reality in the face until compelled to do so. But one wonders whether the most individual monuments of the age were not those that did not aspire to be artistic at all. The Crystal Palace is an experiment so bold as to be almost futuristic, and the possibilities of glass, as the material of a new, dynamic architecture, as opposed to the fixity of brick and stone, are more calculated to appeal to our own notions of relativity, than to the solid preferences of our grandfathers. The Clifton Suspension Bridge is lovely and satisfying to a degree that even the finest efforts of revived Gothic fail quite to attain.

Amid all the treatises on architectural principles of which the forties were so prolific, there is one that has probably been entirely forgotten. The author is a certain William Vose Pickett, whose name does not appear in *The Dictionary of National Biography*. He was probably set aside as a crank—perhaps he was one—but his little treatise, bearing an enormous title of which *New System of Architecture* must suffice, is certainly more original than anything that even a Ruskin could have produced. His idea is to make a clean sweep of the old traditions, and adapt our architecture boldly to the changed conditions of the time. He would go for his materials, not to the quarry, but to the foundry, he would use iron for building as it is already being used for ships and bridges and railways. He would explore the architectural possibilities of other metals, barium, for instance—that produces all the appearance of porcelain on the surface of iron—copper, brass, especially when lacquered,

coloured glass, every description of woven or wire work. His "metallurgic architecture" would likewise avail itself of compositions, cements, *papier-mâché*, encaustic tiles, and make an extensive use of timber, which, it is pointed out, has greater architectural affinities with metal than with stone.

There follows a fascinating chapter on new architectural forms, based on the use of the curved instead of the straight line. Then comes another anticipation of the future, of more ominous import. "The indispensable concomitant of true excellence of architectural effect," that which the new architecture is destined to realise as never before, is, in the author's italics, "*the frequent and uniform repetition of its respective parts and features.*" This is the vision, not of Victorian England, but of present-day Leningrad or Chicago—with mass production annihilating the individual. Mr. Pickett may yet be resurrected, when time has caught up with his imagination. As for Her Majesty's Government, when he submitted his schemes to them, he was told,

"It is not our duty or custom to encourage inventors."

Which goes to prove that parrots and owls are not indigenous to Oxford quadrangles.

CHAPTER XX

CHARACTER AND CHARACTERS

THERE are certain works of genius that are less important for their own sakes than as historical landmarks. There was a play that appeared early in this century called *Man and Superman*. It might equally well have been called *Past and Future*. The Victorian Age had been, almost defiantly, as if in consciousness of a doomed ideal, an Age of Man. For us there would appear to be dawning the Age of Superman. A lover of Wagner would recognise in it the Twilight of the Gods.

Neither Mr. Bernard Shaw, nor his master, Nietzsche, realised to what unknown god they were constituting themselves high priests. They both thought of the Superman as of an individual, who, in some unexplained way, was to rise as much above the human as Man had risen above the monkey level. But two hundred years before either of them had burst on the world, the portrait of the Superman had been drawn—an awful and monstrous apparition, sprung, armed with sceptre and crozier, from the brain of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. You can see it in the original edition, a man made up of men, packed together like worms in a carcase—the name of him Leviathan. For there is another biological analogy besides that associated with the name of Darwin. The human body has turned out, in the light of modern research, to be just such a Leviathan. It is a

community more populous than the greatest nations, made up of living creatures inconceivably primitive as compared with the Republic Man, creatures specialised in accordance with the various services to the whole that it is the end of their being to perform, and who can be systematically starved, on occasion, that their bodies may form a sort of perpetually renewed Chinese Wall round about the community.

This last simile is borrowed, not inappropriately, from the most influential philosopher of modern England, Mr. H. G. Wells,* the arch enemy of individuality in this world and the next. Men are to the species what cells are to the man.

"The one remains, the many change and pass."

Nor is Mr. Wells alone in this opinion. It is gradually capturing the civilised world. Mussolini is annihilating the individual in the name of patriotism, the rulers of Russia in the name of the proletariat; the once sacred name of Liberty no longer commands even lip homage. Man, who deemed himself divine and immortal, sees his little day drawing to a close, and its last crimson beams strike upon the grim figure of Leviathan, breast high, as in Hobbes's frontispiece, above the Eastern horizon.

Sometimes we may be inclined to doubt whether it may not after all be an illusion, that an age of giants has been succeeded by one of pigmies. But men are not likely to rise above the level of their own ambitions, and where both the faith in individual greatness and the desire for

* The authorship, I think, is unmistakable, in spite of a son and a colleague collaborating.

it are on the wane, there is no god or destiny likely to thrust it upon us. We are content to be specialists, to concentrate our energies on as small a field as possible, that we may function with the precision of well-tested mechanical parts. That may account for the most striking phenomenon of the Great War—so far at any rate as England is concerned—in the extraordinary lack of outstanding personality among the leaders, after Kitchener, whose reputation had been made under Queen Victoria, had gone to his death beneath a cloud of disapproval, and the aged Fisher had departed in flaming revolt against the Lilliputian bonds by which genius was shackled. It was not only that there could arise no Iron Duke and no Corporal John, no Drake and no Nelson—but if we take such a comparatively small affair as the Indian Mutiny, where in the whole World War shall we find, for sheer individual personality, the peers of Havelock, Outram, the two Lawrences, Hodson, Strathnairn, Roberts, Neill, and the mighty Nicholson, the man whom an alien sect spontaneously worshipped as a god? Perhaps one Lawrence to stand as the equivalent of two—but after him? Well did Mr. Kipling modernise the old Wisdom into,

“Let us now praise famous men,
Men of little showing,”

to which Mr. Wells, followed by Mr. Lytton Strachey, would doubtless add,

“Let us now attack * great men, if there ever were any great men.”

* But perhaps I wrong Mr. Strachey. He would, no doubt, prefer to call it “humanising” his victims.

Since the tallest and nearest figures make the best targets, the attack has been concentrated with peculiar violence on individual Victorians. And yet, cruelly as the Victorians have suffered from their biographers, we can place to their credit one enormous, though implied, admission, namely that they are eminently worth biographising. If it were not for the convention of good taste, on the one hand, and the law of libel, on the other, one could cite the names of eminent Georgians, whose reputations no future biographer will ever bring to earth, or, indeed, dig up out of it.

With all its faults, and they were many, the Victorian Age was one conspicuously rich in character—and characters. The cult of moral earnestness, the stress of competition, tended to foster those qualities of concentration and independence that are the basis of individuality. The very seriousness with which the Victorians took themselves, tended to foster personality. A habit of humorous self-depreciation may come not far short, in effect, of a craven fear of being great. Such men as Gladstone, as Ruskin, as Thomas Arnold, do undoubtedly invite the same sort of ridicule as the immaculate circus manager gets from the clown. But to reverence the highest when you see it, even in the looking-glass, is at least a potent means of auto-suggestion to live up to the highest standard.

What was most favourable of all to the development of character, was the love of liberty that in the middle class had the strength of a religion. There was nothing that aroused the enthusiasm of the reformed electorate so much as the idea of resistance to tyranny. Any for-

eign revolutionary, who sought refuge on English shores, was sure to be lionised. The Lancashire cotton operatives never wavered in their support of the anti-slavery cause, during the American Civil War, though multitudes of them were thrown out of employment owing to the blockade of the Southern Ports. Byron's

"plain, sworn, downright detestation
Of every despotism in every nation"

had become the normal, emotional reaction of the man in the street.

Nor was there ever a time when the sentiment of individual liberty was so strong at home. The average Englishman desired nothing more fervently than to be left alone to carve out his own fortunes. His economics were based on the free play of enlightened self-interest. His politics were biased by a watchful jealousy of state interference. His intellectual leaders, even when they were not individualists by profession, made up for it in practice. Carlyle, in spite of the Prussian discipline he came to worship in his old age, was the most intractable member of a family notorious for its aggressive independence even among Lowland Scots. And independence is the quality in a man that attracts Carlyle most, as in the incident he records of Samuel Johnson, a needy servitor at Oxford, pitching out of the window—"with what thoughts!"—a pair of shoes that some kind person had left at his door. And Ruskin, though he was perpetually talking about obedience, and though he made it a leading principle of his Company of St. George—where it meant obedience to him—was the most wayward and

wilful even of Victorian individualists. The weakness, and no small part of the charm of his immense literary output, arises from its complete lack of intellectual discipline. What writer of our own day would dare to bring out a plea for a union of churches under the title "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds," a practical joke that increased Ruskin's royalties by the pence of certain earnest sons of the soil who expected a very different return for their money?

A raw and aggressive independence seems to have been the quality of all others prized, and displayed, by the Victorians. One of the secrets of Lord Palmerston's immense popularity was the impression the ordinary man had formed of old Pam, that he didn't care the straw that wagged from his mouth, what he said to any one. Nor, as a general rule, did he, even when conducting diplomatic correspondence, a fact that made his tenure of the Foreign Office a nightmare, not only to the rest of Europe, but to his Royal Mistress and his Premier, Lord John Russell. But the Queen found that Lord John could be just as blunt on occasion, for when she asked him whether it was true that a subject was, in certain circumstances, justified in disobeying his sovereign,

"Well," replied Lord John, "speaking to a sovereign of the House of Hanover, I can only say that I suppose it is."

But neither of "these two dreadful old men," as the Queen called them, could hold a candle to her for sheer domineering will-power. The young girl who could bolster up a defeated and discredited ministry for two years, rather than make the smallest change in the per-

sonnel of her Bedchamber, grew into the middle-aged widow, who isolated herself for long years at Balmoral, in the teeth of popular sentiment, and into the old lady, who, to the last, persisted in excluding her aging and gifted heir from the responsibility and inner knowledge appertaining to his rank. There is this to be said of the Queen's personality—you may like or dislike it, but you will find it uncommonly hard to belittle. It was no mere accident of position that she became, during her last years, the object of a veneration so unquestioning and universal, that only those whose memories run back to the Jubilee decade can realise what associations clung to the idea of "The Queen." Every volume of her letters that comes from the press confirms one's youthful prejudice, to this extent, at least, that among all eminent Victorians, there was none of more outstanding personality than Victoria herself. The idea of her as a mere puppet of the Prince Consort has been blown to the winds by the correspondence of her widowhood. And those late letters of hers that appear in Lord Lansdowne's recently published biography suggest that—contrary to the general belief*—the master hand was as sure as ever, and the grasp on the helm as firm, up to that last meeting with Lord Roberts, when, with the shadow of death already darkening over her, she fell to comparing his Lordship's experiences in South Africa with what another even more famous commander had told her of his difficulties in the Peninsula.

*My own included, and expressed in my *History of British Civilisation*.

The two great apostles of Victorian individuality were John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, and of both of them it can be said that they lived their belief as eloquently as they wrote it. And this—at any rate as regards Mill—is saying a good deal. But where will you find a more robust display of independence than Mill's retort, when he was standing as Parliamentary candidate for the Borough of Westminster, to a working class heckler's

"Have you not said in your writings that working men are generally liars?"

"I did," replied Mill, simply, and it says worlds for the temper of Victorian England that the working men in the audience were highly delighted. We should not advise a repetition of this experiment to modern candidates, who have not previously secured a speedy and certain line of retreat.

Few of the books in which Mill's reputation was founded, when he occupied something very like the position of an intellectual dictator, have stood the test of time. But of the little treatise on Liberty, it is true now as when Morley said so, that to read it adds a cubit to a man's stature. It is a book whose full flavour can be best appreciated by one emerging from a boyhood of pious or sporting conventionality, into what seems to him the dawn of a new freedom. Opening the dingy and small-printed popular edition, after the lapse of many years, he will find it hard to recapture the joy scored, it may be, by dashes of red pencil in the margin.

"It is the privilege and proper condition of a human

being," runs one such passage, "arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way."

Or again—

"He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation."

The message of dawn comes faint and distant on the afternoon breeze, like the horn-blast of Roland to the ears of Charlemagne, and yet he must be dull indeed whose pulse does not quicken on reading this noblest of all pleas for independence of thought, word, and deed, the more compelling from its restraint.

The whole essence of it was packed by Robert Browning into his one sonnet—an answer to the question "Why am I a Liberal?" of which the sextet runs:

"But little do, or can, the best of us:
That little is achieved through Liberty.
Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow should continue bound? Not I,
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is Why."

In Herbert Spencer, the individualist tendency of the age was exaggerated to the point of caricature. His philosophy is long out of date, except for its muscular and down-right style, but he only lacks a Boswell to become as representative a figure of the nineteenth, as Dr. Johnson was of the eighteenth century. To some extent he himself has supplied the deficiency in his *Autobiography*, a wonderfully candid piece of self and family revelation.

In the Spencer family the soul of the British middle class, in the early nineteenth century, stands revealed in its hedgehog-like independence, its remorseless energy, its contempt for the pleasures and graces of life. There is that fine old grandmother, who survived into the forties, one of the first disciples of John Wesley, still, at the age of 83, wearing her plain Methodist cap, and of whom her son recorded that "her activity was so uniform that I do not recollect even the appearance of indolence. Her fault, if any, was in doing too much." There is Aunt Mary Ann, with "a strong sense of her own claims and not a duly proportioned sense of the claims of others." There is Uncle Henry, who ruined himself by speculation, and used to go out of his way to court insult by flaunting a white, Radical top hat. There is Uncle John, who was "entirely egoistic, and in pursuit of personal advantage sacrificed the interests of other members of the family without scruple"—Aunt Mary Ann knew him as "boasting John" and "blustering John," which her nephew gravely diagnoses as "descriptive names indicative of deficient sympathy." Uncle William, on the other hand, had "the desire to be facetious," but, in Herbert's doubtless expert judgment, "without the power of being so," and was "generally considered somewhat odd." Then there was Spencer's father, who refused, on principle, to address anybody as Esquire or Reverend, or to take the least visible notice of any question addressed him by his wife, that he did not consider to have been framed with sufficient clearness. Last, but not least, there was Uncle Thomas, the Simeonite parson and temperance reformer, by whom all public amusements were un-

compromisingly tabooed, and who, being asked by a hostess why the youthful Herbert declined to take part in some waltzing, annihilated her with the awful finality of his pronouncement—"No Spencer ever dances."

The house in Exeter Street, Derby, in which the philosopher was born, was as austere as Uncle Thomas himself—Terpsichore could hardly have contrived to dance behind that façade of featureless brick. It was such an environment, and such an ancestry, as only the English middle class could have produced, such as alone could have rendered credible the phenomenon of Herbert Spencer. All the austerity and independence, all the pedantry and egotism, all the narrow, concentrated energy of these non-corybantic Spencers, were united and intensified in his one person. At the age of thirteen, he defeated even Uncle Thomas, to whose tutelage he had been entrusted, by leaving his uncle's parsonage, in the neighbourhood of Bath, and performing the really astounding feat of foot-slogging the whole way to Derby, with no more than two shillings in his pocket, concerning which escapade his Aunt, while still uncertain of his fate, records her "decided opinion that unless his parents punish him severely, and return him again to us *immediately*, it will not only be *insulting* to us, but *ruinous* to the boy himself."

Never was child more authentically father to the man. The fact that Herbert Spencer carried the family non-conformity a stage further by casting off the last rags of Christianity, only intensified his truth to the Spencer type. His hatred for any sort of authority fell not far short of an obsession. He strode through the Realms of

Gold like a Goliath, brushing Homer, Plato, Dante, Raphael, Michelangelo, Kant, contemptuously out of his path. He would hurry through Italy, not, like ordinary tourists, to admire, but to carp at old buildings and old masters and the very scenery. His egotism was untouched by either humility or humour. When he got tired of conversation, and did not want to leave the company, he used unobtrusively to plug up his ears. In spite of his portentous flirtation with George Eliot, he was frank enough to congratulate himself on his celibacy—"I am not by nature adapted to a relation in which perpetual compromise and great forbearance are needful." Nor, for that matter, was Carlyle, and it is not surprising that the two sages could not meet without violent disputation, culminating in a mutual and speechless glare.

The worst faults of the Victorian middle class were exaggerated in Spencer, its Philistinism, its lack of culture and urbanity, its incapacity to philosophise—for who but Spencer would have dubbed his God (the good, old, eighteenth-century Deity) unknowable, and then proceeded to know so much about him? Who but he would have succeeded in weaving his inherited prejudices so completely into the texture of the Universe? And yet the greatness of its blemishes does but serve to emphasise the greatness of Spencer's personality. There never lived a man more magnificently true to himself and his ideals. A chronic invalid, tortured with insomnia, and incapable of any prolonged exertion, indifferent to fame and contemptuous of honours, he never wavered through all the long years of his self-imposed task of formulating a universal philosophy. Carlyle might—or might not—have

changed his attitude of defiance for one of worship, had he but realised that he was glaring into the eyes of a hero.

And it is remarkable concerning Herbert Spencer, that he, like another great Victorian, John Nicholson of the Mutiny, has become an object of worship among a sect of devotees. There are few forms of irreverence that any one dreams nowadays of resenting, but once let the name or philosophy of Spencer be blasphemed, and the stoutest of Victorian rulers will descend on the offender's knuckles. For there is still a sect of earnest and old-fashioned Puritans, strong in the faith of their grandparents' biology, to whom the Unknowable is God and Spencer is prophet. Long and immutably may they survive!

So far we have only dealt with one or two prominent names, and have necessarily conveyed a very imperfect idea of the extraordinary richness of that age in individual character. To do justice to such a theme one would have to write more biographies than ever Sir Leslie Stephen edited. For it is not only with eminent Victorians that we are concerned.

It is no accident that the period of middle class supremacy almost exactly coincides with the career of Dickens. It was only in such a time that Dickens could have found scope for his genius. It is impossible to imagine anything equivalent to the Pickwickian gallery of portraits in a modern novel. You might as well invite a party of Brobdingnagians into a ball-room. Nor, for that matter, could anything like the raw-blooded exuberance of Handley Cross society be conceivable in the wild-

est sporting novel of to-day. Even when they fly to the Arabian Desert for virility, our lady novelists no longer give birth to Heathcliffs and Rochesters. The Victorian was pre-eminently an age of characters in fiction. May we not be permitted to conjecture that this was because it was an age of characters in life?

It is an impression that deepens the more we study that life, from no matter what angle. Let that angle, for a moment, be academic. Where now is the old breed of Victorian dons, those "regal dons," of whom Mr. Belloc sang—can it be a generation ago? Nowadays we partially fill the old chairs with efficient specialists, gentlemen in the public school tradition, who would be as much at home in an officers' mess as at a High Table—worthier citizens, no doubt, than many a crusted old Victorian bachelor. But they themselves would modestly disclaim the style of "characters." To-day Mr. Belloc might look in vain—and I trust with regret—for the don capable of doing anything so unconventional as daring to attack his Chesterton.

But even at the beginning of the century, there remained only one or two survivors of the old school, living witnesses to the credibility of the legends from which the atmosphere of Victorian donhood may be partly reconstructed. There is the stately figure of Provost Okes, of King's, who died, at an immense age, in 1888, and who, during the long tenure of his Provostship, set his gnarled and parrot-beaked face like a flint against any suggestion of reform, and is said to have dominated his Council by stoutly refusing to allow motions of which he disapproved to be brought forward at all. When at last re-

form was forced upon him and his college by act of Parliament, and King's ceased to be the closed preserve of Etonian scholars, his official reception of the first non-Etonian Fellow was overwhelming. After looking the poor man up and down, with intense disapprobation, he finally pronounced, in deep and measured tones, the verdict:

"Let us hope that this new leaven will not leaven the whole lump."

It helps us to visualise him, when we are told that he was the last Provost who drove about Cambridge in a gilded coach of state; also that many of his *jeux d'esprit* are preserved—in the original, and no doubt correct, Latin.

There were such paragons as Bradshaw, the University Librarian, who, without having accomplished anything specially notable in the way of scholarship, seems to have towered above all his contemporaries by the force and grandeur of his personality. There were, on the other hand, such intractable characters as the old gentleman who successfully defied even Okes, and who used to delight the undergraduates by marching round the court, with a parrot on each shoulder, one trained to repeat "Okes, Okes, Okes," and the other, "Brock, Brock, Brock"—being short for Brocklebank, the Provost's chief ally. One day, after all efforts had failed to remove him from his Fellowship, he was discovered under the college mulberry tree, with a spade, chopping maliciously at worms, and muttering,

"Haven't got me yet, damn you! Haven't got me yet!"

After this, we are prepared for the legend of the some-

what similar old gentleman who lived above the gate of his college, and used to mark his disapprobation of the tutor by habitually belching on his head, until, that functionary having armed himself with an open umbrella, there came a bellow from above of "You coward! Be a man and put that down!"

Or of the proctor who remarked to some undergraduates:

"Your conduct, gentlemen, has not only grieved Almighty God, but also seriously displeased Me."

It is not a bit more incredible than many of the remarks one has actually heard from the lips of Oscar Browning, who was the last, and perhaps the grandest, representative of authentic Victorian donhood.

The Victorian dons are not unworthy to stand beside those dubious and intrinsic old men of Edward Lear, who danced quadrilles with ravens, cut up their food with scythes, walked through the streets of London brandishing pigs, and looked out of windows to say, "Fil jomble, fil jumble, fil rumble—cum—tumble." Such respectable yet defiant individualists could only have been the product of a Victorian brain. In a sense, or nonsense, they are the supreme representatives of the Victorian ideal.

We may shift our point of view from the academic to the pedagogical, and turn our regard to the mighty headmasters, whose names will endure as long as, and perhaps longer than, the schools they revolutionised—Arnold of Rugby, Thring of Uppingham, and their peers. Or to the parsons of the old, and perhaps—from the strictly clerical standpoint—unreformed school, though no one would use such an epithet in connection with Dean Purey

Cust of York, with his stately person, his magnificence of courtesy that would have graced a hidalgo of old Castille, and his vast stores of heraldic erudition. Affection even now clings to his memory, and justifies his epitaph in the Cathedral—"A man greatly beloved." As O. B. may be styled the last of the great Victorian personalities among dons, and Warre of Eton (almost as tough a reactionary as Okes) among headmasters, so I should be inclined to claim for Cust a similar position in the clerical world. But in such matters of opinion and necessarily limited knowledge, there can be no finality.

All one can hope to do is to convey some sense of the God's plenty of individual character by which the Victorian Age was distinguished. To sum it up as briefly as possible, I should say that its distinctive quality was one of earnest exuberance. The flood tide of personality was perpetually overflowing its banks, often with disastrous, nearly always with incalculable effects. The deified John Nicholson, to whom we have already referred, had not only been known to rush at a brother officer, under fire, and kick him in the direction of the enemy, but he was at one time for deposing, and at another, when himself mortally wounded, for shooting, out of hand, his own commander-in-chief, who probably deserved both. Gordon was another such incalculable genius, which accounts for the instinctive dislike of him in our own age—a dislike which has enabled the cock-and-bull story of his drunkenness to be propagated and accepted on evidence that it would be a compliment to describe as flimsy. It is only fair to say that it would take quite a considerable amount of strong drink to stimulate an average modern

to the full-blooded exuberance that was soberly habitual in his Victorian equivalent.

Whether the balance of advantage works out in favour of the past, or the present, may be a matter for debate. We can best express the difference as that between a torrential river, mountain fed, and a canal, cut straight across a level plain. The analogy holds, in that the river requires a vast labour of artificial restriction to keep it from flooding, and is in that sense less free than the canal—the best defence of the Evangelical Lord being that, like certain ferocious school-masters, he had a wonderful way of his own in dealing with unmanageable boys. Finally, though the river is a more magnificent and soul-stirring object, and will generate a greater volume of transformable energy, the canal has the advantage when it comes to prosaic barge traffic.

Our desire to do justice to that earnest exuberance which the conditions of the Victorian Age tended to generate, must not blind us to its insufficiency, by itself, to level up the standard of character to requirements so exacting, beyond all precedent, as those of a revolutionised environment. A soul resembles a machine in this, at least, that the first of all things needful for it is energy. But that energy must be disciplined, and cunningly guided into the proper channels, if it is not to be wasted, or destructive. That, in the soul, is the function of the intellect, or, more precisely, of intellectual discipline.

It was just this element in which the Victorians were—perhaps fatally—deficient. Their energies seldom seem to have been co-ordinated in the best possible way towards the best possible ends. As we follow the steps

of one after another of the giants who walked the earth in those days, our admiration is mingled with a certain bitterness of disappointment. They did much, it is true—but with that inexhaustible energy they might have done so much more, to make a world fit for their descendants to live in. Certainly of Darwin, perhaps of Browning, almost of Dickens, we feel that the whole best in the man was realised, that there was no wastage of energy. But of how many Victorians can we say this?

Can we of Ruskin, with his perpetual transition from the sublime to the eccentric, his lack of the synthetic faculty that resolves such a book as *Modern Painters* into a huge anthology of purple patches, his rigid limitation of outlook, that enabled Whistler to pillory him, before the world, as a High Priest of the Philistines? Can we of Newman, who, we feel, had it in him to have been as indisputably “the” philosopher for the new age, as Aristotle had been for that of the Schoolmen—had but the breadth of his vision been commensurate with its height, and depth? Can we of Carlyle, with his decline from hero-worship to something not far removed from Devil-worship? Can we of Gladstone, with his spiritual fervour that is never quite distinguishable from spiritual pride, his extraordinary inconsistencies, and his capacity for saying nothing whatever with the noblest eloquence that ever stirred the great heart of a people? Can we of Tennyson, of Shaftesbury, of John Bright, of Gordon? It is perhaps ungrateful, but yet hardly to be avoided, that our appreciation of what the Victorians have done should be clouded by the thought of what they had it in them to do—and did not.

Finally, we have to resolve what seems to be an inconsistency between the natural exuberance of the Victorian character, and the disinclination that we have noticed in the Victorians ever to give that exuberance full scope, ever to trust whole-heartedly and without reserve to their inspiration. The answer, I think, is that they instinctively dared not, because their natural exuberance was not informed by that harmony of the intellectual and spiritual powers that a Greek would have known as "eurhythmia"—something equivalent to Shelley's Intellectual Beauty. They dared not unchain forces so violent and so uncontrolled. Lacking a directive principle, they were bound to set up, and abide by, artificial checks. The only alternative to the Spirit is, in fact, the Law.

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CHAPTER XXI

WERE THE VICTORIANS SNOBS?

OF all the charges that it is fashionable to level at the Victorians, there is none more constantly repeated than that of snobbery. It is generally repeated in such a form as to imply that snobbery was a special discovery of the Victorians, and something by which their age is conspicuously distinguished from our own. If it were *chic* nowadays to thank God for anything, we should most of us be doing so, with especial fervency, on the ground that we are not like the snobs our grandparents were.

This is surely an indiscreet attitude. Had the prosecution limited itself to saying, "the Victorians were snobs," it might at least have put up a plausible case. It is always possible to fall back on Thackeray, though even his evidence cuts two ways, for it at least shows that, in the forties, one of the foremost writers of the time was able to stand up and denounce snobbery, in all its forms, in a magazine which owed its success to the fidelity with which it expressed middle class opinion. Indeed, so popular were Thackeray's "snob" articles in *Punch*, that he was induced to keep the ball rolling long after it had lost its first and natural momentum, which accounts for *The Book of Snobs* rather outstaying the reader's interest in its latter stages.

The difference, in this regard, between Thackeray's time and our own, is best indicated by the fact that now-

adays the magazines that cater for the middle class, instead of denouncing snobbery, devote their best energies to its mass production, on a scale that would have made the doughtiest snob of the forties stare and gasp. I doubt whether anybody of that time could quite have understood the mysticism that induces otherwise sane people to part with a weekly shilling for the rapture of gazing upon photographs of uninteresting but monied people in ungraceful attitudes, and frequently with open mouths, amusing themselves in rigidly stereotyped ways—"Sir Bors Boomgarden, at the Old Heavy Puppy Judging Trials, showing his programme to the Hon. Rosemary Stult." It is one form of mass production that was only stimulated by the catastrophe of a World War, as if the curse of Adam could not be fulfilled without the sniggerings of Eve. It lends an additional horror to the waiting rooms of dentists. And yet, so inured are we to this sort of thing, that not only does nobody ever dream of detecting snobbery in magazines of the kind we have described, but it is in their pages that we shall probably find the keenest strictures on Victorian snobbery. This would seem to indicate a standard of self-criticism worthy of the mate, who, returning greatly uplifted from a revival meeting, announced to the crew:

"Now, look here by ——! I'm going to have no more —— swearing on board this ship, and the next —— as I catch at it, I'll —— well give the —— Hell."

But the fact that snobbery has developed out of all proportion since the time that Thackeray wrote, by no means invalidates his diagnosis of this new, diseased growth in the social organism. In such a society as that

visualised by Shakespeare, in which degree, priority, and place are scrupulously honoured, there can be no question of snobbery. His Coriolanus was as proud as Satan, but he was no snob. Neither were the tribunes who engineered his banishment snobs. As long as people are sure of their place in society, there can be no question of snobbery—it is only when degree is vizarded that it can arise. The eighteenth century, in spite of its sprinkling of adventurers and *nouveaux riches*, afforded comparatively little scope for the members of one class to ape the style of another. The Industrious Apprentice may have become Lord Mayor, but it is extremely unlikely that he ever boasted to his aldermen about “my friend, Lord Chesterfield.”

The snob was, in fact, a by-product of the Industrial Revolution. The enormously increased importance and wealth of the bourgeoisie had had the effect of vizarding degree to an extent unprecedented since the dissolution of the monasteries had provided funds to start a new nobility. Now that fortunes were being made and lost so rapidly, even humble shop assistants, like Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse, began to ape the manners of swells, and to dream dreams of Ten-thousand a year. And had not the firm of Pitt and Company dealt even in coronets with those who could pay for them?

There was an element, even in snobbery, that was not altogether contemptible. Its rise was largely stimulated by the romantic enthusiasm that was at its height in the thirties and forties. There was an almost universal desire to escape from the brutal reality of the machine age into the dream of an idealised past. In spite of Macau-

lay, the neatest suburban villa lacked the attractiveness of a castle in Spain. But from an idealised past it is not a very far cry to an idealised present. The vanished glories of Barons on the Rhineland and Caliphs in Bagdad was scarcely more calculated to impress the clerk or shop assistant and his womenfolk, than that of the swells upon whom he could feast his eyes in the Row. There is a pathetic longing expressed in the old song,

"I'd like to be a swell,
A-roaming down Pell Mell,
Or anywhere, I don't much care,
So I could be a swell."

Samuel Warren made a masterly analysis of this trend of mind when he described the counter jumper Titmouse starving himself, in order that his miserable salary of £35. a year might run to enough cheap finery to enable him to have one weekly hour of glorious life, in the Park, on Sunday morning, ogling the girls, and lounging as nonchalantly as a d'Orsay. On such occasions, letters would marshal themselves before his mind's eye into the words, "Sir Tittlebat Titmouse, Baronet," or even "Lord Titmouse."

Tennyson's Lord of Burleigh, like the gallant lover he was, showed perfect comprehension of the feelings of a Miss Titmouse, when he suggested to his bride that they should

"see the handsome houses,
Where the stately nobles dwell."

Tennyson was, in fact, as much a romanticist of the modern country house as of the feudal castle. As for Disraeli,

he was able to throw a glamour over the lives of his great gentlemen and ladies, which shows this most romantic of all adventurers to have had certain affinities with Don Quixote.

If we turn up the old annual, *Keepsake*, we shall find sentiment of this kind spread thick and luscious. Take *The Gardener of the Hall* by Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton,

Thus eighteen summers every day I tended her (the
daughter of the house) and them (the flowers),
I watched the opening of the bud, the shooting of the
stem,
And when her childish laughter turned to silent maiden
smiles,
I felt in heaven when e'er she passed, and scarce on earth
the while.
How could I ever think to leave the old manorial hall?

This otherwise excellent girl makes a *marriage de convenance* with a rich lord:

"And now I wander up and down, I labour as I can,"

obsessed by the thought that even the young lady of the old hall may be no happier than a gardener. Where, in these degenerate days, are gardeners to be found so properly inclined?

Where the social order is in a state of such fluidity as it was during the nineteenth century, snobs are bound to arise. They were quite as much *en evidence* in the France of Louis Philippe as in contemporary England—if, indeed, we can use so breezy a word as "snob" to de-

scribe heartless and inhuman pushers like the Mme. de Marville, in *Cousin Pons*. And the English bourgeois, like other Englishmen, had a strong romantic streak in his composition, that made him rather inclined to idealise a lord, even to the extent of allowing lords to govern in his name. Dickens, that most redoubtable of Radicals, was more merciful to his gentlesfolk than Thackeray, who, coming from a stock of Anglo-Indian civil servants, was less given to romancing about the gentlemanly attributes of gentlesfolk. I do not believe that Dickens would ever have had the heart to describe so dirty, mean, and vulgar a squire as old Sir Pitt Crawley. Nor would Thackeray have let off Sir Leicester Dedlock so lightly, and even affectionately, as Dickens does. Lord Frederick Verisopht, in spite of his name, dies as valiantly as any knight-errant, in defence of a lady against a scoundrel. If we may borrow a phrase from Dickens's doughtiest modern champion, we may say that his typical member of the upper class—and we would not make a complete exception even of Twemlow—"though an ass is a gentleman."

No one would dream of calling Dickens a snob, and we may see in this great representative man of the middle class in the days of its supremacy, how Radical independence was not by any means inconsistent with that tendency—in him admittedly a slight one—to be sentimental about gentility, which, if pushed far enough, develops into snobbery. But—and this is the important point to remember about the early Victorians—this tendency was still held in check by a sturdy middle class self-respect.

We have already remarked on this quality in the Victorians. We are accustomed to laugh at them for their respectability, but it is a better and nobler ideal to be respected for what you are—be it merchant or tradesman—than to be furtively ashamed of it, and solicitous only to conform to the most approved country-house or smart-set standards. John Bright and Cobden were as proud of being honest business men, as any Hungarian Count of his forty ancestors in direct line. It was only towards the end of his life, when the first symptoms of change were beginning to appear, that Dickens got to describing a really snobbish atmosphere in the Veneering family. Mr. Dombey was proud, but he was proud of his money and commercial position, and his giddiest ambition was for the firm to become Dombey and Son. Mr. Podsnap has little to recommend him, but, in proclaiming his Gospel of Podsnappery,

“He speaks with an honest, triumphant pride.”

Or let us pass from Dickens to Surtees. There are some of us who may think the idolisation of Mr. Jor-rocks a little overdone, but in one quality the grocer Falstaff may fairly challenge the appellation of “great,” and that is his superb absence of snobbery.

“You ’air-dresser on the chestnut ’oss,” roars Mr. Jor-rocks, during a check, to a gentleman with very big, ginger whiskers, “pray, ’old ’ard!”

“Hair-dresser,” replies the gentleman, turning round in a fury, “I’m an officer in the ninety-first regiment.”

“Then you hossifer in the ninety-fust regiment, wot looks like an ’air-dresser, ’old ’ard!”

Even Mr. Soapy Sponge, who is what his name implies, is not in any sense a snob. He is an adventurer, and, like his friend Facey Romford, more than a bit of a blackguard, but neither he nor Facey is out to improve his social position. Both are sportsmen to the backbone, and both, being men of insufficient financial means, are determined to get their sport by any means, fair or foul. But Sponge never dreams of toadying to his victims. The man who could fire a charge of shot into Mr. Jogglebury's poor, ill-trained Ponto, may have been a brute, but he was not a snobbish, but a sporting—which is sometimes the worst kind of—brute.

If the early Victorians of the middle class were in the habit of sentimentalising about the nobility and gentry, they were equally fond of standing up to and defying them on the slightest provocation. This may be seen in the career of *Punch*, whose note was then, as now, cunningly attuned to the mind of the fairly prosperous, black-coated citizen. The *Punch* of the forties was as sardonic and merciless an employer of the cudgel as his great original, but he had a generous hatred of oppression and sympathy with the bottom dog, and he did not in the least care how he expressed them.

Imagine a *Punch* of to-day publishing so savage an attack on the Game Laws as one, in 1844, representing a Duke in the act of sacrificing a kneeling peasant to a hare, or one, of the year after, entitled *Noble Poulterers*, in which a Duke is represented as hawking his game about the streets—which he can do cheap, it is explained, because they are nourished on the wheat, oats, and barley of his tenant farmers! And we must remember that this

peculiarly unromantic practice of turning sport to profit is one pilloried also by Disraeli, for Disraeli is another instance of that Janus-like attitude to birth so characteristic of the time, and even Thackeray did not deal more mercilessly with his upper class than Disraeli in his *Sybil* or *The Two Nations*.

To return to *Punch*, we can imagine the horror and wholesale withdrawal of subscriptions among his modern clientele, were he to publish so positively Bolshevistic a cartoon as one to which we have already referred, contrasting capitalist luxury with the horrors of the labour in the mines, or displaying such sympathy with crime as that entitled *The Home of the Rick Burner*, in which a demon with a torch is waving it before a poor fellow in a tumble-down hovel, sitting heart-broken beside the corpse of his starved wife, with his starving children beside him; and the cupboard empty.

Nor is even the Royal Family spared, for we have Prince Albert's Beehives, "so constructed that the working bees within (that are a very curious species of bee and bear an outward resemblance to British mechanics and artificers), are carefully deprived of all the honey they elaborate, save the honey that is considered sufficient to afford them ample subsistence in all seasons."

We wonder what a Marx or a Lenin could have added to this.

Punch's tilts at Dukes did not end with the forties; for instance, in 1859, he attacks battue shooting, with special reference to the Duke of Rutland, remarking bluntly that "battue banging is not sport." In 1862 it is the Duke of Buccleuch, referred to disrespectfully as "Sawney,"

who mounts the pillory for offering resistance to the new line of the Thames Embankment. As late as 1880, the old fire is not quenched, for there are repeated attacks on the Duke of Bedford—or Mudford—for the disgraceful condition of Covent Garden, while in 1883 there is a shot at a royal Duke and Duchess for selling family portraits and furniture. But *Punch*, and the middle class with him, were by this time becoming too well schooled in gentility and good taste to go on with such unreasonable jesting, of which this is one of the last specimens.

That crabbed old *Punch* of the mid-nineteenth century was no doubt a Philistine, and an exponent of the worst John Bullish insularity, but his sins, which were many, may be forgiven him for the sake of his great heart. There was no humanitarian cause to which his support was not given. It was he who drove some of the last nails into the coffin of the duel; it was he who took up the woes of governesses; he who palliated the conduct of a poacher earning 8/-a week, and called for the informer on him to be put to Coventry; it was he who lashed the upholders of flogging in the army; it was he who denounced the virtual existence of one law for the rich and another for the poor; it was he who, as stoutly as Dickens himself, stood up for the victims of the new Poor Law. Nor were his sympathies confined to the human race, for he was, for a long time, one of the most fearless champions of animals, and not even aristocratic or royal sport was exempted by him from the ordinary criteria of humane conduct. The crowned head of Victoria herself shared the fate of Judy's, on account of her presence at one of her husband's deer-massacres in

Coburg, and, as late as 1878, stag baiting, by the royal pack, was contemptuously put on a par with badger baiting.

We have heard enough, and more than enough, about the defects of the Victorian bourgeoisie. I have no desire to minimise them, and there is a certain poetic justice in the fact that the enormous self-adulation of that class in the days of its supremacy should have given place to a reaction just as indiscriminating. But if the middle class were proud, they had a great deal to be proud of. It was they—and it would be but a slight exaggeration to say, they alone—who produced that harvest of genius and talent by which the Victorian Age has enriched all succeeding time. Their very critics and satirists were sprung from their own ranks. Mr. Podsnap and Mr. Bottles, those awful examples of the British bourgeois at his worst, were the creation of bourgeois brains.

What was remarkable about our middle class of that time was not its selfishness, for selfishness is a weed bound to flourish on such a soil as that provided by a life and death economic struggle for survival; it is not its occasional snobbishness, for that is bound to crop up in a time of social transition—what is remarkable and almost unique about it is its generosity and idealism, the extent to which it was ready to sacrifice its interests and class prejudices to what it held and felt to be right. What is remarkable about a man like John Bright was not that he—though himself a model employer—should have reconciled his conscience to his interests to the extent of opposing factory legislation, but that he should have put principle before class, to the extent of agitating for a

franchise that was to break down the power of the bourgeoisie and enable the workers to prescribe the remedy for their own grievances.

The sentiments voiced by *Punch* in the forties are those expressed to-day in the columns of class-conscious publications catering for a proletarian audience. But few, if any, manual labourers in the forties could have afforded a *Punch*, and not all of them could have read it. Its contributors and cartoonists, men like Thackeray and Jerrold, Leech and Doyle, could not by any stretch of language have been described as lower class. What is remarkable about *Punch* is that he, a bourgeois of the bourgeois, should have established himself as a national institution, by catering for a middle class audience, whose blood was ready to boil at any spectacle of tyranny and oppression brought vividly before its eyes, in spite of its obvious interests and its scarcely challenged capitalist economics. The strangeness of the phenomenon will appear, when we think of Mr. Punch to-day—a hale and genial octogenarian, gentlemanly enough to know that the kind of thing he did in his youth is not done, and shrewd enough to recognise that, even if it were, the doing of it would constitute his own death warrant.

And when we speak of middle class insularity, it must not be in oblivion of the fact that, in his dealings with other nations, John Bull, if he had a narrow and insular mind, had also a big heart. Sometimes the narrow mind had the best of it, as in the shameful war on which England embarked, in 1857, under the guidance of her Victorian Darling, the evergreen "Pam," with the object of forcing opium on the Chinese. Here the situation is per-

fectly summed up in the *Punch* cartoon, which displays Palmerston, with a pigtail in one hand and a "cat" in the other, and a delighted Punch in the background calling, "Give it him well, Pam, while you're about it." Public opinion was almost as bad on the subject of Ireland; and here insular and anti-Catholic prejudice played into each other's hands, until the man in the English street was quite honestly convinced that Ireland—with her population halved by one of the most awful disasters on human record—was the abode of murderous yahoos, with no special grievances that were not of their own creation.

But as a general rule, John Bull's heart, at least, was on the right side. If he was offensively officious, and wanted to have a finger in every pie, the things that he hated were generally bad things—if tyranny and libicide are to be counted as bad. It was a fine and chivalrous gesture of Pam's, when he got the French to join him in strengthening the Sultan's hands, against the demand of Austria and Russia that he should give up the Hungarian patriots. It was certainly a noble and more effective gesture than that of chalking "Surrender the Kaiser!" on the Queen of Holland's door, and then making an ignominious departure.

It may have been wrong of Barclay and Perkins's men to have tanned the hide of a Field Marshal who had performed the same service for Hungarian ladies, and certainly highly improper for Pam to have been so jaunty about it afterwards; but is there anybody, even now, who does not harbour some sneaking regret that he was not

on the spot to add his contribution to the old hero's richly earned guerdon?

It is hard to justify the English tourists who, when French bayonets were propping up the Papal Government at Rome, could not be restrained from singing the Garibaldian songs of liberty in cafés and restaurants. Certainly no English tourist would be so indiscreet as to breathe the word "liberty" in Rome to-day. But the fact remains that the cause of Italian unity is not a little indebted to the sympathy of English Liberalism, and certainly Garibaldi would never have crossed from Sicily to the mainland, but for the silent acquiescence of the British navy, and the very decided line taken by the British government against the outraged despots of the Continent.

It was something, at any rate, to be proud of, that in a Europe in which a ruthless national egotism, whose high priest was to be Bismarck and whose culmination the World War, was steadily gaining ground, one nation should have stood—however waveringly and with whatever lapses—for the idea that a nation itself is a moral being, that the obligations of honour, duty, and principle are as binding in the Many as the One. Such a notion was latent even in the dry Whiggery of Lord John, and it was something more than latent in the bouncing knight-errantry of Palmerston. With John Bright, with Gladstone—in spite of all the latter's inconsistencies—it took on a religious complexion; they believed that a nation could not only be moral, but moral in a Christian sense. There were those who carried such principles even further, like the three Quakers who actually made a pilgrimage, just before the outbreak of the Crimean War,

to St. Petersburg, in order to implore the Iron Tsar, in Christ's name, not to unsheathe the sword. They were received with all the courtesy of a great gentleman, though much derided and abused on their return to a war-fevered nation. And yet—though it is hard not to smile at their simplicity—one's fancy runs to speculating on what might have been the fate of Tsardom, had the miracle happened, and the iron heart melted. Certainly the grey hairs of the first Nicholas would not have descended in sorrow to the grave, and perhaps—who can tell?—the tragedy of his line might not have swept to the unspeakable horror of its final scene in the cellar.

The fault of Victorian policy did not lie in its idealism, as modern critics are apt to imply, but in the very reverse. Its great and basic defect was that of the Victorian nature, that defect imputed to the Church of Laodicea. The Victorian ideal was not coldly egoistic—like that of Metternich and Bismarck—but it lacked the fire of inspiration. It was moral on the principle of limited liability. Perhaps the greatest of all Victorian cartoons is that which represents Palmerston, slightly fuddled after a Cabinet fish dinner at Greenwich, saying to Lord Panmure—whom readers of Mr. Strachey will remember as the Bison—"What humbugs we all are!" And Pam was a humbug, not for standing up for the weak and for liberty, but for proportioning the stoutness of his attitude to the weakness, or distance, of his opponent.

The Crimean War was worse than humbug; not because of the generous impulse that prompted the man in the street to take on the big bully of Europe, but for the reason stated by Meredith's Nevil Beauchamp:

"He wished to know whether the English people would be so anxious to be at it if their man stood on the opposite shore and talked of trying conclusions on their green fields. And he suggested that they had grown so ready for war because of their having grown rather ashamed of themselves, and for the special reason that they could have it at a distance."

So too we can say of Gladstone, he failed—in so far as he did fail—by not being Gladstonian enough. His apostleship of liberty did more than any other thing, before the War, to make our name honoured in Italy, in Greece, and in the Balkans. His faith in freedom was of priceless value in building up the British Commonwealth of Nations; his faith in justice, even where we were the losers, in the matter of the Alabama arbitration, was a landmark in progress towards international peace, and one of the first links in a chain that may yet span the wide Atlantic.

But when he espoused the cause of slavery in America, when he played fast and loose with the Transvaal, when he drove John Bright in horror from his Cabinet by the bombardment of Alexandria, when he almost came to giving up the patriot Arabi to be done to death by the Khedive, when he sought the freedom of Catholic by the slavery of Protestant Ireland—then he was a Victorian in the worst sense in which the word is used, the self-righteous self-deceiver that his enemies would depict him.

Or take the ordinary middle class Englishman of the time. His insularity, though gross, is never quite contemptible, when he is voicing a principle. It was no doubt wrong for *Punch* to have represented the King of

Prussia and the Emperor of Austria as a couple of criminals had up before a very fat and ferocious John Bull on a charge of assaulting Denmark. But perhaps it is not a bad thing that even crowned bullies should be shown up as the criminals they are. What is wrong with the picture is the position accorded to Mr. Bull, who would certainly not have dared, and, in point of fact, did not dare, to lift a finger, or anything but his voice, to interfere. Again, there is nothing necessarily Philistine in Tennyson's talk about the "red, fool fury of the Seine." It was a point of view that, right or wrong, Tennyson was at perfect liberty to hold and defend about the French Revolution, and no whit more ridiculous than the snobbery that whitewashes the September Massacres, and almost canonises Marat, for no better reason than that they were French, and that the more we have of culture, the Frencher we will be.

Where John Bull was really vulgar and Philistine, was where he was making not the least pretence to principle, but instead of being, or even posing, as the champion of the little fellow against the bully, came forth as a bully and a braggart himself, loud-mouthed and unashamed. The national character was seldom seen to worse advantage than in the hysterical agitation that finally drove a peace-loving Premier, against his will, into a useless war with Russia. The send-off of Sir Charles Napier's fleet, that accomplished nothing whatever in the Baltic saw the wave at its crest—Palmerston uttering a farewell speech of incredible braggadocio and offensiveness, and the man in the street bawling forth his soul in the chorus

“England and France will soon pull down
The Eagle and Imperial Crown,
And his bearlike growls we soon will drown
With—‘Let us give it to him, Charlie!’”

The seed thus sown was not long in producing its harvest of blood and tears, but other seeds were thoughtlessly dropped that took longer to mature. Prussia was, at the time, in the position of Austria as regards John Bull—he felt that he could insult her with glorious impunity. Some forgotten friction in the year 1855 moved *Punch* to suggest the following National Anthem for Prussia:

“If a blockade’s in store
For Fatherland’s poor shore,
If our Fritz * bring
On us the lion’s claws,
We shall have ample cause
To sing with all our jaws:
God save the King!”

In 1861 we find *Punch* presenting a toy ship to a diminutive German, and advising him to cut away and not to get into a mess, and in 1864 the worst insult of all is levelled at the Fatherland, in a drawing of a jolly Jack Tar pointing to a typical German sailor—modelled evidently on the popular version of the comic Dutchman—and saying to his mate: “We can’t be expected to *fight* a lubberly lot of swabs like him, we’ll *kick* ’em, if that’ll do!”

There is no such talk after Jutland—perhaps if there

* Frederick William IV.

had never been such talk, there might not have been Jutland.

We need not multiply instances of the narrowness, the arrogance, and fearful self-complacency that characterised the middle class, in this time of its supremacy. That has been done by Dickens, who loved them, and Matthew Arnold, who detested them. And no doubt, in the late sixties, when Matthew Arnold opened his attack, a decline was already beginning to set in; the idealism and generosity were wearing a little thin, and the self-complacency had become harder and more egoistic.

But it is the wildest injustice to treat the bourgeoisie of this splendid and prolific epoch as if they were only snobs and Philistines. The charge of snobbery is wildly exaggerated, that of Philistinism states less than half the truth. There was as much idealism, generosity, disinterestedness, to be found among the men of Dickens's time, as among those of Shakespeare's or Cromwell's. Their tragedy is at least not ignoble. They brought much to the solution of the great problem with which they were confronted, that of adapting their civilisation to the conditions of a machine age. But they did not bring quite enough. In that their tragedy consists.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE BARBARIANS

IN the four mid decades of the century, it would not be far short of the truth to say that the history of England is the history of the middle class. The middle class was the brains of England; her policy, her standard of civilisation, were the realisation of bourgeois ideals.

For the working class, after the final collapse of Chartism, the time was one of steady and fairly contented progress. No doubt conditions were shocking enough, judged by the standards of to-day, but contentment is relative, and there is no disputing the fact that after the repeal of the Corn Laws, and on to the seventies, the wealth of the country was increasing at a rate that eclipsed all previous records, and that the working man was getting at least some share—whether or not it was a just share—of the general prosperity. And progress, though unexciting, was not unfruitful. It was a time of necessary germination. Working men were learning how to combine in trades' unions; they were building up a vast organisation of co-operative stores. The Chartist mob was being drilled into an army, that might, when it had finished with the barrack square, some day take the field.

The upper class was more *en evidence*. Throughout the fifties and sixties its prestige, and splendour were, to all appearance, undiminished. Agriculture continued to flourish in spite of free imports, and the great estates fur-

nished their owners with lordly incomes. It was not, in fact, till the end of the seventies, that the sentence, so long deferred, was at last executed. A series of bad harvests precipitated a disaster that the competition of cheap foreign corn had made inevitable, and the landed interest received a blow from which it never recovered. The day of the old upper class, based on land and hereditary descent, was over. The new plutocracy rose, and has been in process of swamping it ever since.

It may be doubted, however, whether the fall of any people or class can be explained entirely on economic grounds. *Homo Sapiens* is a nobler animal than some of his latest specimens give him credit for being. It is usually the rotten tree that succumbs to the elements, and the body does not putrify before the soul has departed. What sort of a soul, we may ask, was there in the Victorian upper class in the days of its splendour? What part did that class play in the task of adapting civilisation to the new conditions?

I have tried to ~~find~~ ^{find} what was the state of the upper class when the Reform Bill ended its long tenure of practically supreme power. One attribute that it shared with the bourgeoisie consisted of an almost demonic energy. If we may compare men with machines, we should say that the squire, like the business man, registered an enormous horse-power. But whereas, with the business man, this power was almost entirely devoted to work, with the squire, by far the greater part of it was put into an equally strenuous play. Now sport, or play, is a form of human activity in which the part of the intellect is overshadowed by that of the muscles. As sport came more and more

exclusively to dominate the interests of the upper class, its capacity for leadership in other departments of life proportionately diminished.

The time with which we are dealing, from 1830 to 1870, was as fertile in outstanding genius as any similar period in our annals. The mediocre twenties—at least after the death of Byron—were succeeded by the brilliant thirties, nor did the fires die down during the next three decades. But in all this, the upper class had practically no part whatever. There was no sort of an intellectual awakening among their ranks, corresponding to that of the bourgeoisie. They remained, with unruffled complacency, in the trough of mediocrity into which they had sunk. Compared with their record in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their decline in every department of creative activity will be manifest.

Let us first take the field of statesmanship, for here the upper class held a position of overwhelming advantage. Not only were they still conceded almost a monopoly of cabinet rank in most governments. And their whole upbringing was supposed to fit them for such functions, and they had not to waste the best years of their lives in making fortunes. We have certainly Palmerston and Russell, statesmen whose minds were formed in the Georgian tradition—Palmerston had been a Lord of the Admiralty within two years of Trafalgar. Lord John's is a reputation that has not worn well, and we do not think that his warmest admirer to-day will credit him with genius. On the other hand, the reputation of Lord Shaftesbury has greatly increased since his death. There remains, among the major statesmen, Lord Derby, an ex-

cellent debater and a not particularly distinguished translator of Homer, but who is only remembered to-day as having been the Tory *roi fainéant* to Disraeli's Mayor of the Palace. Add to this that Lord Salisbury served his apprenticeship during these years, a younger son, who had, significantly enough, passed from Oxford into the stimulating atmosphere of Colonial life, and had subsequently been forced to make a living by his pen. And Salisbury did not come into the limelight until well on into the seventies.

It was the middle class Peel who revived the Conservative party on middle class lines, after the debacle of 1832; it was under his auspices that the tremendous gamble of a Free Trade policy was embarked upon; it was the middle class Cobden and Bright who made that policy inevitable; it was the middle class Gladstone who carried it to completion. The Tory party, overwhelmed by this second disaster, and bereft of ideas and leadership, was forced, in the teeth of its inclinations, to go for both to a middle class Jew. And when Queen Victoria's "two dreadful old men" at last dropped out of the Whig leadership, the party became Liberal under the auspices of Gladstone, with the middle class Carden, Forster, and Lowe, as his ablest lieutenants. And henceforth, till death intervened, Gladstone and Disraeli towered high above the throng of lesser politicians.

How easy it would have been for any competent aristocrat to have come to the front, is shown by the position and influence subsequently attained by the Duke of Devonshire, whose bovine mental lethargy was reinforced by

an impressive honesty, and an even more impressive beard.

If the record of the upper class in its chosen field of statesmanship is disappointingly meagre, in other fields of creative activity it has even less to show. Surtees, Swinburne, and Bulwer-Lytton, for what he is worth, may be claimed as authentic scions of the English upper class; Lyell was of an old Scottish family, and Thackeray of Indian civilian stock. There was a scattered glimmering of minor lights, such as Lord de Tabley, Lord Houghton, Roden Noel, and that rather prosaic historian, Lord Stanhope. This is not much to show for the class that had produced Byron, Shelley, Scott, Chesterfield, Gibbon, Horace Walpole, Cavendish, and "Citizen" Stanhope. It would not be an exaggeration to describe the condition of the aristocracy and landed gentry as one of intellectual bankruptcy.

When Gilbert wrote a song to the effect that in good Queen Bess's time,

"The House of Lords made no pretence
To intellectual eminence,
Or scholarship sublime,"

he quite misunderstood the spirit of the Elizabethan Age, but the words would exactly fit the Victorian aristocracy. It is extraordinary how small a part those who owned the stately homes of England played in her history. What were the orders of nobility doing to justify their existence? Where were the heads of our historic Houses? For the most part they were engaged in galloping furiously over the countryside in pursuit of vermin, or slaugh-

tering game by means of powder and shot, or financing the training of horses to gallop against each other, and making this the excuse for the most unprofitable of all forms of speculation. To such pursuits was brought the same concentrated earnestness that in the middle class was applied to money-producing work, or to various forms of creative activity. The celebrated "doctor in boots," who informed his patients that they would shortly be dead if they did not immediately go hunting, would probably have been taken quite at his word in Shropshire or the Shires.

The atmosphere of English country society in the middle of the century requires a considerable effort of the imagination to realise. The importance of the various county magnates was something that would be almost inconceivable in our more democratic, or plutocratic, environment. A lord in those days was a lord, and made no bones about it, and a squire was one of the "minores barones," a little despot in his own sphere. Readers of Trollope will remember the dinner parties given by the Duke of Omnium, in which His Grace did not even deign to greet his guests individually, but after presiding at the head of the table during the meal, retired to his own apartments and left them to their wine. The lesser magnates were just as important in their degree. They lived on their estates, and their doings, and quarrels, which were frequent, were the talk of the whole countryside. One of the few scintillations of the aristocratic muse that have survived, is the couplet of Lord John Manners, which, be it remembered, was written and taken perfectly seriously in the forties:

"Let laws and learning, art and commerce die,
But spare us still our old nobility."

There is this, at least, to be said for these old county magnates. Whatever may have been their lack of brains, they had, in full measure, the rich individuality of character that was a special mark of the age. They lived out their own lives with a full-blooded assurance that the way they had chosen was the right one, that their status and privileges were rooted in the very nature of things. For this reason, they seldom asserted them in a way that was felt to be humiliating. The average squire was too sure of his dignity to be always thrusting it in people's faces, and even the proudest noblemen were often men of quite shabby attire and unassuming manners. Of the first Marquis of Abergavenny, Disraeli's friend, I have heard it said that one of his under-gardeners would have been more at his ease talking to His Lordship than to the head-gardener.

Let us go to Surtees as the most favourable witness as to the kind of character rife in the upper class during the early forties and fifties. Mr. Ralph Nevill, who is the most uncompromising admirer of this class and everything connected with it, tells us of Surtees, that his portrayal of English country life, during this period, is "of considerable historical importance." Very well, then, let us select from Surtees's gallery a portrait which Mr. Nevill, who certainly knows what he is talking about, assures us to have been taken from real life, and to have been easily recognisable by contemporaries. We refer to that of the Earl of Scamperdale.

This nobleman was the possessor of a magnificent estate, a splendid mansion in the Italian style, filled with all kinds of objects of art, purchased by his ancestors in the eighteenth century, and possessed a fortune of £90,000. But the Victorian Earl, who was "stumpy and clumsy and ugly, with as little to say for himself as could possibly be conceived," had no taste for beauty, or magnificence, or anything else but the pursuit of foxes. "He had the house put away in brown holland, the carpets rolled up, the pictures covered, the statues shrouded in muslin, the cabinets of curiosities locked, the plate secured, the china closeted," and he himself abdicated the main body of the mansion, and took up his quarters in the steward's room, with what used to be the muniment room converted into a bedroom for himself, and the plate room into another for a hanger-on, of uncertain origin, called Jack Spraggon, who did not turn up his nose at the cow-heel broth and almost raw beefsteaks that formed their daily fare, and who helped his Lordship with the hounds.

"The sitting-room, or parlour as his Lordship called it, had an old grey drugget for a carpet, an all-round black mahogany table on castors, that the last steward had ejected as too bad for him, four semi-circular wooden-bottomed walnut smoking-chairs; an old spindle-shanked sideboard, with very little middle, over which swung a few book-shelves, with the termination of their green strings surmounted by a couple of foxes' brushes. Small as the shelves were, they were larger than his lordship wanted—two books, one for Jack and one for himself, being all they contained; while the other shelves were filled with hunting-horns, odd spurs, knots of whipcord,

piles of halfpence, lucifer match boxes, gun charges, and such like miscellaneous articles."

What were the two precious volumes that formed his Lordship's and Jack's sole reading, history does not relate, though we know that when Mr. Sponge produced his solitary volume, Mogg's *Ten Thousand Cab Fares* (price one shilling), Mr. Facey Romford remarked, in great surprise,

"What, you're a literary cove, are you?"

What sort of a literary cove Lord Scamperdale was may be judged from his unfortunate inability to write to Mr. Jawleyford an account of Mr. Sponge's misdeeds:

"Not being a great scholar, and several hard words turning up that his Lordship could not well clear in the spelling, he just confined himself to a laconic."

It would be impossible to conceive of a more vivid portrait of boorishness, Philistinism, and ignorance than that which the Dickens of the English countryside draws of this great English nobleman. Indeed, we may search through all his novels to find one of his numerous lords and gentlemen whom we can describe as being in any sense a man of culture.* The only way in which their tastes in any way differ from those of cave men, just emerged from monkeydom, is that they had not the cave's man desire for, still less his capacity for creating, beautiful works of art.

That Lord Scamperdale was by no means a unique specimen of his class will be evident to any one who cares

* Mr. Jawleyford certainly made a pretence, on one occasion, of reading Dizzy on Lord George Bentinck, but this was pretty obviously one of Jawleyford's many shams.

to study the record of individual families. The day of great collectors, who enriched England with the choicest works of foreign art—works which their descendants are now busy disposing of, for what they will fetch, to American lovers of beauty—had gone, never to return. By the Victorians, the heritage of their ancestors, still unsold, was recklessly trodden underfoot. This was sometimes true, in the most literal sense. In a certain great mansion, tapestries, of priceless value, were spread on the floors as carpets. In another country house a collection of prints, accumulated by one of the most celebrated of the old, Hell-fire intellectuals, was used to make a screen for the nursery, the prints being cut up into appropriate shapes, before being operated upon by a large family of children.

But the rakes of culture were no more, and as for the new owners and their houses, they served the Lord. Out of one great art collection, a certain picture, now among the Venetian masterpieces in the National Gallery, was kicked with ignominy because the noble and pious owner was not going to have the eyes of his womenfolk shocked by the spectacle of one of their sex naked. The same prohibition extended to babies, for a more recent painting of an infant but realistic Hercules was likewise disposed of, free, to the owner's brother, who, somewhat surprisingly, was a clergyman. He was, however, a man of resource, and procured an artist to effect certain cheap but essential alterations, so that to-day the picture stands displayed, in a form calculated to placate Mrs. Grundy, but somewhat to intrigue anatomists.

Nor was Lord Scamperdale by any means the only Master of Hounds to be troubled by problems of or-

thography. There was one, in Kent, whose deficiencies in this respect got him out of a serious scrape. There was a certain great lord in the neighbourhood who cared more for pheasants than foxes, and whose deer park was a sort of Tom Tiddler's Ground to the neighbouring packs. But a fox, who, having run from a considerable distance, was perhaps not aware of the local taboos, slipped through a hole in the park palings. The Master, deeming that in such a case of necessity the only course was to hack through, jumped off, and with the aid of one of his whips tore quite a considerable gap, through which the hounds and field passed. It was only when he got home that somebody pointed out to him the unforgiveable nature of the crime that he had committed, and advised him to make such timely amends as were possible. Accordingly he sat down and wrote,

"DEAR LORD —:

"I am afraid this afternoon I had to pull up some rotten old pailings (sic) in your park. I hope" etc., etc.

When he received this letter on the following morning, his Lordship, who was already on the verge of apoplexy and litigation, would almost certainly have crossed it on reading the word "rotten," had not the next word but one simultaneously caught his eye. Now he was by way of being a wit, and a wit of the ponderous and unhurried school that wages warfare by a process of sap and parallel reminiscent of the old siegecraft. The spelling of "pailings" was an opportunity not to be missed. The original grievance was forgotten, and for the rest of the morning

his Lordship was engaged in the composition of a long and elaborate epistle, commencing somewhat as follows:

"DEAR MR. —:

"When I was at Eton, I was under the impression, which would now appear to have been erroneous, that the spelling of the word 'palings,'" etc., etc.

This incident, and incidents like it, were reported and discussed in all the country houses of the district, and from the dining rooms the fame of them spread to the servants' halls, and thence to the farms and cottages. The importance attached to the proceedings of these now wholly forgotten worthies is something hard for us to conceive of. But interests at that time were few, and life must have been terribly dull, apart from sport, in the country. Even the Assembly Rooms were robbed of their glory. The county families, as we learn from *Cranford*, no longer met together once a month during the winter to dance and play at cards—only "a musty odour of aristocracy lingered about the place" when the rooms were occasionally opened for some entertainment like that of the ex-sergeant conjuror, Brunoni.

The country houses themselves—such of them as have not been stripped of their old contents—bear silent witness to the disappearance, in Victorian times, of the old, aristocratic culture. There is scarcely a big house that has not a well-stocked library. There are ponderous volumes of the classics, in eighteenth century editions, there are calf-bound *Spectators*, *Ramblers*, *Tatlers*, and all the English and foreign classics with which a man of taste, in the reign of George III, could possibly have surrounded him-

self. But a modern visitor from Mars, if his experience were confined to a round of country house parties, would probably report, on his return, that earthly literature evidently came to an abrupt close early in the nineteenth century, to start again, in the twentieth, with an author called Edgar Wallace. Books had, in fact, become furniture, and that they might fulfil better their only conceivable function, were, by careful owners, locked up behind glass, and the keys taken away.

But it is not only to the library we need go for evidence. Everything, within and without, is in keeping, and produces just such an impression as we might have got from some rich patrician's dwelling, after it had been occupied by a generation or two of Goths. The objects of *vertu* have still been preserved, after a fashion, less from a sense of their beauty, than of the importance conferred by their possession. Even so the barbarian nature is revealed by such outrages as putting the best china under glass domes, or sheer ignorant destructiveness of the kind we have already alluded to. And the sort of pictures and furniture added by the Victorian owners forms a melancholy advertisement, that the class that had set so high a standard of taste during the past, and whose patronage had called for the making of so many kinds of beautiful things, had abdicated its functions, and degenerated into a mob of barbarians, who had reverted to the primitive routine of the chase.

We remember how *Punch*—that intransigent *Punch* of the forties—had published a cartoon showing a kneeling peasant being sacrificed to a hare. He might have followed it by another, showing a country gentleman, in

the act of sacrificing himself, and all his possessions, to a three-headed Moloch—a Trinity of Fox, Pheasant, and Race-horse.

And possessions were often cast away wholesale in the most literal sense. The gambling mania survived from the eighteenth century well on into the heyday of Victorian respectability. Gentlemen whose fortunes were so enormous that they might have been proof against any conceivable extravagance, contrived to dissipate them on the Turf. There was the last Marquis of Hastings,* one of the richest men in England, who started betting in hundreds at the age of sixteen, and in thousands at that of nineteen, and died a ruined man, and practically of a broken heart, at the age of twenty-six, having deliberately courted the society of the low parasites who battered on him—"Flash Fred" and his tribe. Surtees has given us a very similar type in his Sir Harry Scattercash, with his associates, Quod, Seedybuck, Spangles, Bouncey, Cutifat, and the rest of them.

Surtees seems to have been under no illusion as to the atmosphere pervading a Victorian racecourse. From his sympathetic account, and not from any Puritan propaganda, we should be justified in describing it as one of almost undiluted blackguardism. One of the most horribly realistic things in Victorian literature is where poor Jack Spraggon is killed at a jump, and lies unheeded by any one in the crowd except his patron, Lord Scamperdale, and some roughs.

"'Oh, my poor dear Jack,' exclaimed his lordship,

*For the best account of him see *Fame and Failure* by Julian Ellis.

throwing himself off his horse, and wringing his hands in despair, as a select party of thimble-riggers, who had gone to Jack's assistance, raised him up, and turned his ghastly face, with his eyes squinting inside out, and the foam still on his mouth, full upon him . . . his lordship sunk overpowered upon the body. The thimble-riggers then availed themselves of the opportunity to ease his lordship and Jack of their watches, and the few shillings they had about them, and departed."

"When a lord is in distress," continues Surtees, "consolation is never long in coming," and come it does, in the shape of that arch humbug, Squire Jawleyford of Jawleyford Hall, who, "seeing the rude, unmannerly character of the mob," that comes pouring to the spot, as soon as it is realised that there is a dead man on view, leads off the Earl, who is blubbering incoherently about his friend having been "such a fine, natural blackguard." The scene is as grim as anything in Hogarth.

The Victorian Derby appears to have been just this sort of thing on a huge scale, those who could not afford wheeled conveyances hiring horses, and returning in different stages of intoxication, with the addition of such simple joys as those provided by false noses, pea-shooters, and so forth.

Of what strange doings were covered by the word "sport," we may judge by the fact that after the University boat-race of 1862, both crews joined for the purpose of setting dogs on cats in a shed, the shed being provided by Cambridge and the animals by Oxford.* As late as

* Woodgate's *Reminiscences of an Old Sportsman*, quoted in *London and Londoners* by A. R. Bennett.

the sixties, it was a by no means unknown thing for a badger to be brought home, by some sporting young fellow, for the purpose of being torn from his tub, with merciless reiteration, by the teeth of terriers.

The Victorians, as a general rule, managed to conceal the coarser side of their lives so thoroughly under a mask of respectability, that we often fail to realise how coarse it really was. Those fine old squires whose portraits more or less adorn the family dining room, would have fallen rather startlingly below our standards of refinement in certain respects. Though it was supposed to be very rude to associate with ladies in the clothes you had worn in the smoking room, I have good authority for stating that, in the days before water drainage became universal, a gentleman's clothes often bore unmistakable witness to quite another recent location. There was a lack of furtiveness about certain doings that would have delighted some of our younger intellectuals. Not having the honor to be one of them, I am unable to record the habitual use made by one great sporting magnate, after Divine Service and in full view of his fellow worshippers, of a mediæval and probably ancestral grave-slab.

Could we have recourse to the vast, unwritten literature of bawdry, we should be able to form a more veracious notion of life, as it really was in those not so very remote times. We are apt to forget that the refinement of mixed society was paid for by a compensating grossness of masculine intercourse. When the Victorian gentleman exchanged his dress coat for his smoking jacket, his act was symbolic. He was putting on a new man—or, perhaps, one might say, an old Adam. His smoking room

humour was more direct and racy of the night soil than the elusive and rather perverted style in present vogue. Even Tennyson was noted for the Lincolnshire broadness of his anecdotage.

There was a great and flourishing underworld of vice. Mr. Ralph Nevill, writing in 1919, speaks of "the unblushing licence accorded to night houses and other resorts where, less than fifty years ago, the grandfathers of the present generation held high revel without, in due course, let it be added, becoming any the worse husbands and fathers." * Celebrated harlots, like "Anonyma," used to flaunt their charms openly in the Park and at race meetings, and were surrounded by be vies of fashionable young men. The era of respectability was also one of high play and fast living, though in both these respects the tendency was towards an improvement on pre-Victorian standards. This was even more the case as regards the still heavy drinking from which even clerical circles were not altogether exempt in the mid-nineteenth century.

It was only as regards intellect and taste that the upper class showed a decline from the level of the previous age. Here there is unfortunately no room for doubt—the evidence is overwhelming that Matthew Arnold's characterisation of them as Barbarians is no more than the truth. Nor did there seem any prospect of improvement in the future. The efforts of the great reforming headmasters had not extended to the intellectualising of the public schools. It is seldom that there is supply without any demand, and the parental demand was not for intellect, but for character. And character the public schools did

* *Echoes Old and New*, p. 229.

supply to an extent unapproachable anywhere else in Europe. The large amount of power delegated to the boys themselves, under the monitorial system, engendered habits of command and responsibility.

These are gifts of importance, but they require the guidance of a trained intellect to make them fruitful. What happened was exactly what might have been anticipated. The barbaric scale of values, that exalts physical prowess above truth and beauty, passed from the fathers to the sons, and the aim of public school discipline was more and more diverted from the production of scholars to that of sportsmen and athletes. Eton, the most aristocratic of all these schools, was also the most obstinately unintellectual. In the course of the traditional rivalry between Eton and Harrow, Eton "gentlemen" were habitually contrasted, by themselves, with Harrow "cads," but there was one contemptuous concession that no Etonian minded flinging to the men of the Hill:

"Harrow may be more clever,
Rugby may make more row!
Swing, swing together!"

cleverness and noise being evidently valued equally. But no Harrovian has ever, so far as I know, showed the slightest desire to counter with the obvious repartee, that it is less discreditable, particularly in the absence of a river, to be a bad oarsman than a dunce.

The strength of the public school system lay in the training that it provided for the younger sons of the aristocracy. These sons had not yet begun to enter business to any considerable extent, but the power of com-

mand that the system engendered not only furnished the army commanded by the Duke of Cambridge with officers, who, if not much more intellectual than their chief, were at least brave, and popular with their men, but it was of inestimable value in the work of empire building, that was now proceeding apace. The squire's son easily adapted himself to the open air life of the colonies—and there was, in fact, a contemporary piece of advice to fathers which ran:

“If you have a son who's always on the dun,
The sort of chap would ruin any family,
Take him by the heels, and never mind his squeals,
And drop him right down in a colony.”*

The younger son also played no small part in providing an incorruptible, if somewhat unimaginative, administrative staff for an India now removed from John Company's government, and under direct British control.

* I quote this from memory, but am unable to trace its source.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SAINT MARTIN'S SUMMER OF ARISTOCRACY

WHILE it is difficult to exaggerate the disastrous nature of the surrender, by the upper class, of its functions of cultural leadership, at the very time when such guidance was more needed than ever before, we must not be blind to the useful functions that it still fulfilled. And first let us note that the barbarism into which it was sinking was softened and humanised, to some extent, by the influence of its womenfolk. And here the differentiation between the sexes, which has made the Victorian woman the target for so much modern depreciation, acted as an unmitigated blessing, by preventing her from being swept along the flood tide of muscular debauch. From Surtees, we gather that the sight of a lady, as apart from half-ladies, like Lucy Glitters, was, in his time, practically unknown in the hunting field, though no doubt in the sixties the equestrian lady, in a very long and dangerous habit, was beginning to figure at meets. But on the whole, we may say that the country gentry, if they had not risen above the standards of the primeval cave, had not yet fallen below them to the extent of mingling the sexes on their hunting forays. Woman, in her stronghold of the home, could at least see that it was not turned into a glorified pothouse, and that the life of the smoking room, like that of the brothel, should at least be so iso-

lated that it could not contaminate the drawing-room.

Even Lord Scamperdale was drilled into some semblance of civilisation by the Miss Jawleyford who succeeded in capturing him. She got him to wear smart new clothes, and even to grow a pair of bushy whiskers. "She has marshalled a proper establishment, and got him coaxed into the long put away company rooms. Though he still indulges in his former cow-heel and other delicacies, they do not appear on the table."

Some allowance must also be made for the influence of religion. The success of the Puritan Low Church in capturing the descendants of Rupert's Cavaliers was extraordinary, though it was at the price of complete surrender of the old Puritan Radicalism. No doubt a good proportion of the old, openly flaunted viciousness, was merely driven into privacy, but it would be carrying cynicism too far, to doubt that the mass suggestion implied in a rigid outward respectability had not considerable effects in mitigating sexual incontinence. But the Low Church Lord, though a God of righteousness, had none of the attributes either of Athene or Apollo, and sport, provided it were confined to week-days, did not, as in the days of Cromwell, fall under the Puritan ban. As for the humanitarian aspect of it, it never crossed anybody's mind that the Friend of little children could take thought for the beasts that perish. Provided that Squire contributed generously to the plate, went to Church regularly, read family prayers to the servants and the Bible to himself, saw that sin was well cauterised out of his children, and that the third housemaid did not walk to Church with the second footman, the Lord's requirements were more

or less fulfilled, and Squire might ride away and play with a clear conscience.

With all their failings, the landed gentry had at least this to be said for them, that they were—taking them for all in all—popular among their own people. They lived on their estates, they knew and were known by all, and where they did not employ agents, they also worked at the common business of agriculture. A farmer will be very polite to some rich, new, town-bred landlord whom he can exploit, but his real respect will be reserved for the rough-tongued and sometimes close-fisted old gentleman who can haggle with him on terms of perfect equality about the price of a bull. The proudest moment in the 8th Duke of Devonshire's life was when his pig took a prize at Skipton Fair. At the same time, it must be admitted that, even in agriculture, the landlords show a very marked falling off from the scientific ardour that had fired them during the Agricultural Revolution of the eighteenth century. We no longer meet with great innovating geniuses like "Turnip" Townshend and Coke and Bakewell. More and more we feel that play, and not work, holds the lion's share of the average landowner's affections.

It forms a not unimportant sidelight, that the shameful story of the depopulation of the Highlands by their chiefs begins with pasture and ends with deer forests.

The country gentry also played a not unimportant part as unpaid local administrators and magistrates, though with the growth of centralisation and of the elective principle, the once all-powerful Justices of the Peace found

their powers gradually curtailed and their functions restricted.

But we are driven to the conclusion that the landed gentry, as a class, were ripe for the fall that was so shortly, though gently—as with leaves on windless November days—to be accomplished, there was also something corresponding to the October glory of their own park trees, a loveliness even of decay. There was, in the forties, a widespread romantic desire to restore the English countryside to what it was supposed to have been in a highly sentimentalised version of the Middle Ages. The landowner was to be the father of his people, just as the Church was their mother. The old feudal relations, the old amenities of Merrie England were to be revived in Young England. Maypoles were to appear on the village greens, the old dances were to be re-footed, everything was to be as different as possible from the soulless life of the new towns.

It was a generous ideal, though no doubt a great deal of absurdity was mingled with it. Trollope has shown us the comic side of the revival in his account of the Ullathorne Sports, organised on the most correct Gothic lines by Miss Thorne—in the course of which poor Harry Greenacre got his lance between his horse's legs, when riding at a Quentin. The Young England movement must also have afforded scope for such humbugs as Surtees's Mr. Jawleyford, another portrait certified by Mr. Nevill as drawn from real life. Jawleyford would preside over his biennial tenants' dinner, after Mr. Screwmight had eased them of their cash in the steward's room.

Then Mr. Jawleyford would shine forth as the very impersonification of what a landlord ought to be. Dressed in the height of fashion, as if by his clothes to give a lie to his words, he would expatiate on the delights of such meetings of equality; declare that, next to those spent with his family, the only really happy moments of his life were those when he was surrounded by his tenantry; he doted on the manly character of the English farmer. Then he would advert to the great antiquity of the Jawleyford family, and so on.

But Jawleyford, one may hope, was an exception, and there seems no reason to doubt that the romantic—perhaps combined with the Low Church—spirit, did much to humanise relations between the squire and his dependents. Perhaps the mitigation of the still severe game laws, the disappearance of man traps and spring guns, may have had something to do with it, but we get the impression that the average landowner of the sixties was a very different sort of person from the hard and mercenary tyrants denounced by Cobbett—not an unprejudiced, but still a knowledgeable witness. Even the Jawleyfords found it expedient to pose as the fashionable type of benevolent landlord, and with better men there was no need to pose. A more searching wind of criticism was abroad than in past years. The local press was more outspoken and personal than it is to-day, and the landowner, from his very importance, was a mark for Radical ink-slingers of what was then known as the “snarling” type. And the snarler was a hard opponent to counter, for if he was brought to book for libel—as in a case brought by the Hon. and Rev. E. V. Bligh against one of these

gentry at Maidstone—he would, if defeated, prove to be a man of straw.

Nothing is harder to reconstruct than the village life of from sixty to eighty years ago—no records or statistics can give us the all-important personal touch. But old people whose memories run, or did run, back to that time, seem to have looked, as a general rule, with affection on the old families, and with regret on the coming of a new order of things in which even those families that are left are no longer rooted to the soil, but bring down their friends from Town, as Lady Dorothy Nevill puts it, “with the fish.” A very old lady in a Guardians’ Institute, not so long ago, told me she could remember “his lordship”—the Earl of Abergavenny who died in 1868—sending an ox all the way from his Sussex estate to his Kentish manor of Birling, in solemn state, preceded by outriders, to be roasted in the village. There was not always this pleasing ceremonial, but in those days when food was cheap and farming paid, there was not infrequently good cheer at the Hall for those who resorted thither on any possible excuse, and perhaps an occasional barrel of beer supplied at local cricket matches, besides warm garments for everybody at Christmas.

Whatever may be the verdict of history, there is no reason to suppose that the villagers had any criticisms to offer on the Squire’s excessive addiction to sport. Very much the reverse—for they were addicted to it themselves, even when it took the form of poaching, and though crops were ridden over—nominally at any rate with subsequent compensation—and the life of a fox was preserved by the most awful of taboos, there is no reason to

assume that this was resented, on a balance of advantages. I have, indeed, heard tell of a Radical farmer being horse-whipped by a certain Master of hounds, in front of the field, for shooting a hunted fox, and nothing further seems to have happened—in fact, when, long ago, I heard the incident related by the fine old Master in question, the story concluded with the sentence—on which I never dared to ask for elucidation—“And after that he became quite a good Conservative.”

Cricket was in full swing during the fifties and sixties, in fact village cricket was at its best. That at least was a sport in which all classes could and did mingle on terms of equality, except that the squire's son, or sometimes the squire himself, would figure, as by right, as skipper of the local team. Wickets were none too good, and “hit hard, hit high, and hit often,” was the order of the day, but this only made things more exciting, and encouraged a keener sportsmanship and good fellowship.

I would conclude this chapter by quoting from some old records of a Harvest Home, held in a Kentish village in 1871.* I think some idea will be conveyed of the still lingering romanticism that had once been Young England, and was even now a waning ideal.

These harvest homes had formerly been gatherings on a small scale, each master entertaining his people at his own home. This had now been superseded by gatherings on a large scale, all the neighbouring farmers sending their labourers free of expense, “men, women and children,” says the local reporter, “whose attire betokened the

* There is a very full account of it in a book of press-cuttings, collected by the late Hon. and Rev. E. V. Bligh. The name of the paper is not preserved.

pastoral occasion." In one tent a feast was provided for the men, consisting chiefly of huge beef puddings and mugs of ale, while in another tent the women were treated to tea, bread and butter, and plum cake. The Rector, a Low Churchman of the best type, had departed from the then usual custom of ensuring attendance at Church by making the Service precede the meal. He preferred, he told them, to trust to their honour. Before the meal there were sports, organised by the ladies and guests of the Manor and a few helpers, and after it, speeches.

To two of these it may be worth our while to listen. The first was the Rector's. He started by referring to certain agitators, who had been round the district trying to form an Agricultural Labourers' Union. The Rector much regretted that these gentlemen were not there to take part in the proceedings, for "though we might possibly have enjoyed the fun of seeing them in the ditch by the hurdle jump, we should have picked them out with much pleasure." Striking a more serious note, the Reverend gentleman then went on to expound his, and the prevailing upper class, social philosophy.

These men, he said, had promised the Millennium. No doubt there was a blessed Millennium coming, but until that date, it was certain that no earthly millennium could ever be realised—a conclusion that seems to have been greeted with considerable applause. God had appointed, from the very first, that there should be different grades of society, high and low, rich and poor, and it was not for the rich to boast nor the poor to complain. An awful warning was contained in the fate of irreligious Paris, recently in the hands of the Commune, formerly pros-

trate before the Goddess of Reason. "Let us take warning by her fate, and as God has been pleased to constitute various ranks of society by placing some in the higher, some in the middle, and some in the lower ranks, let us cheerfully accept the position He has assigned us, and be thankful for His mercies."

That is a fair and honest translation, into terms of Low Church religion, of the Tory doctrine of degree, priority and place, advocated by Shakespeare, and before him, by Piers Plowman.

The last and most important speech was that proposing the health of the Lady of the Manor, a venerable dowager, and this was entrusted to a certain white-whiskered general, a Peninsular veteran, and a renowned "character" and speech-maker. He had previously given "the Army," taking advantage of the occasion to denounce those new-fangled manœuvres on Salisbury Plain, and the scandalous criticism of officers, as being too ignorant and aristocratic, but he had ended up with the consoling assurance that whate'er might betide "we shall find no difficulty, as heretofore, in beating our enemies."

His second speech requires no comment, except the assurance that it was the kind of thing that was considered graceful and appropriate at the time, and that no aspersion was ever cast upon the General's sobriety:

"I suppose it is owing to the extreme modesty of my friend the Chairman, or perhaps to my own impudence, that he has entrusted me with the toast I am about to propose. It is a toast, however, that I am sure you will all drink with enthusiasm, as would I with my whole

heart, if I had one; but strange as the phenomenon may be, you see before you a man without a heart. I came into this country with one, I admit, but at present I am perfectly without one, and if I explain how I lost it, I think you will all discover that you are labouring under the same defect as myself. But to explain what I mean, I am at the Manor, partaking of Lady ——'s hospitality, and am continually under the refreshing eyes of her three amiable daughters.* [Hear! hear!] I will say nothing more in their praise, though I could speak out largely, but basking under their smiles and partaking of all their friendliness—as I have done for many years—I am proud of them, and at last I find that my very heart is gone. Now if such be the case with me, who have been here only a few days, what must be the desperate case of your own bosoms, living, as you do, under the eyes of Lady ——'s daughters, exposed to their warm, refreshing sunbeams, and partaking of all the bounteous kindness and sympathy of that noble lady and her amiable daughters?

"I know therefore that you will all drink the health of the Countess of —— with acclamation. I believe that that dear lady has been with you for upwards of fifty years. She likes to live here . . . because she finds the people are amiable, good, honest, sober and industrious. . . . Therefore I do not hesitate to introduce the toast to your notice, with the assurance that it will be received with acclamation."

And received it was, with boisterous but respectful applause—less than sixty years ago.

* The youngest of them was turned forty at the time.

CHAPTER XXIV

A TRAGEDY?

THE new school of biography, from which most people derive their idea of the Victorian Age, is, from its very nature, bound to fall short, not only of the whole truth about that age and its achievements, but of the not essential part of it. For, as Mr. Clerihew Bentley so truly remarks, "biography is about chaps" and concentrates on personality. And no doubt a time so rich in personality forms the happiest of all hunting grounds for the student of chaps. But the Victorian Age was one not only of personality, but of work. To the middle class, that set the tone of civilisation, work was a gospel, and demanded a serious and concentrated enthusiasm that bore fruit, thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold, in most departments of national activity.

If we are to judge solely by what was done at the time, without any relation to what might or ought to have been done, a fair case could be made out for describing the four mid-decades of the nineteenth century as more fruitful than any similar period in our history. The only other period of equal length, that could enter into the comparison, is that extending roughly from 1580 to 1620, and would include, among its principal names, those of Shakespeare, Bacon, Byrd and Spenser. It is a rather childish, though an amusing occupation, to pit teams of geniuses against each other, but it would be especially fu-

tile, where, as in this particular comparison, the Elisabethans scored their most impressive triumphs in music and the drama, in both of which the Victorians were at their weakest. But we may perhaps hazard an opinion that whereas one or two Elisabethans rose to greater heights than any Victorian, the Victorians can claim a greater abundance of talents and work of the first order. God's plenty is the attribute of the age.

This impression is greatly strengthened if we turn our attention from works of individual genius to the sum of collective achievement. There was never a time when the country advanced with such giant strides in the paths of peaceful progress. After the Corn Laws and the Charter were disposed of, the figures of increasing wealth and trade attained positively staggering dimensions. A period of warfare on the Continent and in the United States enabled England to improve on the start she had already gained, and to confirm her position as the workshop, not to speak of the bank, of the world. Such extra expenses as those of the Crimean War and the Mutiny, John Bull was able to take in his stride, almost without noticing them. And in spite of the warnings of Mr. Malthus, few people were seriously troubled about an increase in population that merely meant more hands for the workshop. It was obvious that, for the time, at any rate, in the race between population and wealth, wealth was having the best of it.

In every department of life the reformer was abroad, proceeding step by step, and guided more by British commonsense than by abstract theory. Even the classical economics could not prevent enthusiasts like Lord Shaftes-

bury from forcing on to the Statute Book a steadily accumulating mass of legislation for humanising social conditions, until poor Herbert Spencer was moved to cry Ichabod at the triumph of the State over the Man. The condition of the prisons and the workhouses remained deplorable throughout the period, though by the standards the middle class set itself, the system adopted was a success, for crime steadily diminished, and the slow torture and starvation of the Bastilles proved efficient in keeping as many unfortunates out of them as was humanly possible. Education was held up by the bickerings of the godly, but by the end of the sixties the government was in office that was to make it universal.

The Victorian theory of social improvement centred on the idea of giving capitalist enterprise the fullest possible scope, and accordingly the whole capital of the country was mobilised for productive employment, the middle class being coaxed to venture its utmost savings by the principle of limited liability, and savings banks and even penny banks being formed to attract the coins of the poorest. We have already alluded to the great extension of self-help among the workers, by means of co-operative and friendly societies, as well as by the trades unions.

In no respect was progress more marked than in everything connected with health, and the prolongation of life. The revolution effected in surgery by Lister, and in nursing by Florence Nightingale, are merely the most conspicuous successes in the great war waged by mankind on Malthus's "positive checks" on the increase of its numbers. Hygiene and sanitation were becoming matters

of state concern, and centralised control was being employed to break down the complacent filthiness of local authorities. Such drastic restrictions on the activities of the Old Man with the Scythe, who, after all, had his place in the evolutionary scheme, were in themselves calculated to add not a little to man's difficulties; for the more shareholders there are in the venture of civilisation, the more difficult it becomes to maintain dividends at subsistence level.

But space avails not to record, even in barest outline, what manifold and solid work, in the cause of human progress, stands to the credit of the Victorians. It was not only in England that this work was being accomplished, for it was thanks to the foundations laid during these years, that England woke up, about the time of the Jubilee, to find herself the senior partner in a Commonwealth of Nations, and her Queen the ruler over more peoples, nations and languages than little England held counties.

Nor must we forget those invisible fruits of progress that no statistics can measure. Surely we need have no hesitation in saying that England was not only greater and healthier and more prosperous in 1870 than in 1830, but that, taking all things into consideration, she had attained to a higher moral level—in so far as, nowadays, we may be permitted to call the lessening of grossness and brutality a good thing. Among all classes, in varying degrees, there was a movement away from the animal: men became kindlier and more self-controlled, cleaner, less drink-sodden, less crudely lecherous. There was certainly a long way yet to travel, but the day's jour-

ney must be measured from the starting point, and so measured, it must be acknowledged a good one.

When therefore we have tried the Victorian Age (within our defined limits) by the tests of individual achievement, collective achievement, and moral progress, we find that it passes all three with flying colours.

Again, as we have tried to show in the course of the preceding pages, most of the strictures, that it is now fashionable to pass on the Victorians, are either made in ignorance of the facts, or recall the old story of the mote and the beam. The legend of the Victorian woman boils down to the fact that the Victorians had a different ideal of womanhood from that fashionable to-day, but one that appears to have been excellently adapted to the circumstances of the time. The accusation of snobbery amounts to this—that the Victorians strove manfully against the first symptoms of a complaint that has so completely mastered our own age that we are no longer conscious of its existence. As for the alleged hypocrisy of the Victorians as compared with ourselves, we must remember that to an age that prides itself on its entire freedom from any sort of moral idealism, the moral earnestness that was the key-note of the Victorian character is naturally repellent, and, therefore, suspect. That does not prove it to have been any the less genuine. By its fruits it must be judged.

As for the gnat-like attacks on individual Victorians, that add such piquancy to up-to-date literature, their numbers make it impossible to dispose of them, except by the reflection that money is tight and reputations hard to come by, and—a man must live.

What more then, it will be asked, can we want? With what plausibility or justice can we talk of the Victorian drama as a tragedy?

The answer to this question has already been suggested. In judging of the achievement of an age, we are not concerned with applying some rigid and absolute standard, by which that achievement can be measured and compared with that of similar periods of time in the history of our own or other nations; what we have to consider is how far men have proved adequate to the requirements of their own time. An engineer, when he is designing a bridge, adjusts the strength of his materials to the weight he expects it to carry, and to the proposed span. It is no excuse for him, when a railway train has crashed into the river, to plead that other bridges, less strongly constructed than his own, have from time immemorial sufficed for horse traffic. He is dealing with railways.

Or let us look at the matter in another way, and regard Man in his capacity of the highest of animals. Neither his intelligence nor his machines have in any way relieved Man from the task imposed upon everything that lives, that of adapting himself to his conditions. That is the meaning of life, even in the most primitive cell. Matter submits to its environment—life has got to reply.

Environment is the Sphinx, that never ceases to put her riddles to everything that lives, and life must find the answer to each one of them, or cease to be. And as life rises in the scale of evolution, and becomes more opulent and complex, its burden is in no way lightened, for the riddles it has to answer become proportionately

complex and difficult. It is the rule of the Sphinx that to whom much is given, from him shall much be required.

The most dangerous thing that can happen to any species is some sudden change in its environment. The riddle has remained the same so long that the reply has become habitual like the one played on an old-fashioned musical box. When the question is suddenly changed, the old answer is mechanically repeated, and then comes death. Some such tragedy must have overtaken those magnificent and gigantic lizards who, perhaps for as many millions years as Man has lasted thousands, maintained their lordship of creation. Perhaps it was some trifling change of climate, perhaps some cause more subtle still, but whatever it was, the small brains and huge bodies were unable to make the requisite change, and the result was death.

Or take another question, that is being put to mankind at this moment. The institution of war has grown up in response to certain primitive needs. It has been Man's habit, when faced with certain difficulties, to cut the knot, like Alexander, with the sword. Recent experience has plainly shown that, under modern conditions, this method is entirely out of date, and will, unless discarded in future, make an end of a civilisation that has outgrown it. It yet remains to be seen whether human institutions and habits of thoughts are capable of being well and truly demilitarised, or whether we are all destined to perish together miserably on the next breaking of the peace.

Now the conditions confronting the Victorians were just those which biology has shown to be the most dan-

gerous with which living organisms can be faced. The environment of *Homo Sapiens* was being not only changed, but revolutionised, and—what had never happened before in the course of evolution—the species was itself responsible for the change. Without being in the least conscious of what he was about, Man, by means of his newly invented machines, was changing the conditions of his life with a rapidity that would have constituted an inevitable death sentence on any other animal. It remained to be seen whether discourse of reason, or whatever might be comprehended in the word “soul,” would enable him to play the part of Œdipus in answering this last and most terrible riddle, that he himself had propounded.

If the answer was to be found anywhere, it was first and foremost upon England that the task devolved. It was she who had taken the lead and set the pace in this greatest of all revolutions, compared with which the one in France, with its guillotinings and cannon thunder, was a mere storm in a teacup. It was the machines that, in their infancy, had conquered Napoleon. It was by no means impossible that they might, in their maturity, end by devouring the civilisation that had given them birth.

Nor must it be forgotten that besides the peril that threatened mankind at large, England was faced with one proper to herself alone. If human resources should prove inadequate, in the long run, to cope with new demands made upon them, and a machine-made civilisation should break down, it was inevitable that England's fate should be the swiftest and most catastrophic of all. The very start that she had obtained had drawn her into stak-

ing everything upon the success of the new order of things. Unlike any other nation, she had multiplied her population out of all proportion to her capacity for feeding it. More than half of the human beings crowded within the limits of her shores, could not, by the utmost conceivable straining of her resources, keep soul and body together, unless by a never-ending stream of imports from overseas. Once let her fail to maintain her position in the world's markets, and death, in its most appalling shape, would, with mathematical certainty, bring down her population, million by million, to what it was before the days of the railroad and the power-loom.

That central problem was the theme of the Victorian tragedy. Could the people of this island, and, particularly, its dominant middle class, with its energy, its moral earnestness, and its seemingly limitless resources, bring about the miracle of adjusting human life and Western civilisation to the new conditions? If we are to limit our vision to that time alone, it would seem that the answer to the question would be a triumphant affirmative. For it is certain that England at the close of the sixties had—as far as statistics are any guide—not only maintained, but notably improved on her position at the beginning of the thirties. So far from population outrunning the means of subsistence, the tendency was quite the other way. There had never been a time when there had been fewer symptoms of despondency or discontent, and so far foreboding danger ahead, John Bull was a robustuous optimist, slapping his pockets, and calling the world to admire his prosperity, his constitution, his virtue, and everything that was his.

But had the riddle been answered after all, or had its solution been merely postponed? For if we look a little closer into the nature of Victorian prosperity, we shall see that it was due to merely temporary causes. England had taken the lead—thanks very largely to her accumulation of surplus capital during the eighteenth century—in the application of machine power to industry. The wars of the Revolution and of Napoleon had put her rivals out of the field for a generation. When they showed signs of reducing her lead, another generation of wars left England to have it all her own way in industry and commerce. She could easily maintain her position of workshop of the world, when rival shopkeepers were busy cutting one another's throats. The real test would come when, as was inevitable sooner or later, her rivals, the United States, Germany, and, ultimately, Russia, brought their gigantic resources into play, and when the "backward" peoples, who had been content to pay tribute for her capital, and to send raw materials in exchange for manufactures, began to set up shop for themselves. Sooner or later, too, it might come about that mechanisation would become world-wide, and that the nations that had supplied her with food would want it all at home for their expanding town populations.

What would happen when the coal, on which so much of her prosperity had been based, began to be used up—a danger that might perhaps be staved off for an indefinite time by improved mining methods? But what if another fuel, only obtainable from overseas, came to be substituted for coal, and the very foundations of her prosperity undermined?

There was another advantage, of a more intangible nature, that was already, during the Victorian Age, beginning to pass away. The early conditions of industry had peculiarly suited the English type of inventive genius. The fathers of the Industrial Revolution were eminently practical men, workmen for the most part, of slender education, but with a great fund of native commonsense. But as time went on, machinery became too elaborate and complex to yield its secrets to men guided only by the experience of the workshop. It was the trained mathematician or research worker, deeply versed in the theory of his subject, to whom the future of invention belonged. So long as Britain could produce men like Kelvin and Clerk Maxwell, she might fairly hope at least to hold her own, but in this new deal of the cards, trumps were no longer her strongest suit.

So far we have merely dealt with the narrower aspect of the question, as it affected England alone, and we have seen her multiplying her population, and diverting an ever-increasing proportion of it from agriculture to industry, in the confident assurance that the sun of prosperity would always continue to shine, and that where there were mouths to feed, God and the stranger would continue to supply her with food.

But even more important than the fate of England, was that of human civilisation, whose destinies, in the dawn of the machine age, were to so large an extent in England's keeping. How far did she, in setting an example to the world of how to transform human environment, at the same time show how it was possible to adapt life to the new conditions?

The only answer is that she made no serious effort at all. The Victorians decided, in effect, to concentrate on material progress, in the faith that every increase of human power over blind matter must be a good thing in itself. The eighteenth century had encouraged belief in a vaguely conceived of Deity, who would, in some unexplained way, take over the business of directing human progress. In other words, men had only to get on with their work, and all things would somehow be ordered together for good. That was an excellent excuse for the average Englishman to relieve himself from the uncongenial task of extending his vision to the whole of life, and, like Bunyan's citizen of Destruction, seeking, in the name of mankind, an answer to the question, "What shall I do?"

No doubt there were individual thinkers capable of perceiving that all was not well with the kind of progress to which mankind was committing itself. The chief of these was Carlyle, who denounced, in apocalyptic terms, the dehumanising tendencies of the new age. But Carlyle had not the patience nor the breadth of outlook to enable him to think out an adequate remedy. The God of his worship, before He degenerated into a Lord of Hosts buttoned tight in Prussian uniform, bore a suspicious resemblance to the old Deity. The Gospel of work and heroism was a rather more earnest and emphatic rendering of the prevailing belief of the age, that we had only to get on with the job in hand, and trust to the Powers that Be for the higher control. Tennyson, with his Larger Hope, Browning, with his robust confidence that you had only to march breast forward for

clouds to break and right to triumph, the classical economists, with their faith that the conflict of egotisms would somehow be harmonised and made fruitful, were all, in their different ways, devotees of the Deity. This obliging Personage, whose message to mankind was, "leave it to me," was shortly to change his name to "Evolution."

His colleague, the Lord, was even more hopeless, though His methods were less insidious. He was frankly unintellectual, and clung to His taboos and His Genesis, with an incapacity for either learning or forgetting worthy of the Bourbon family. The majority of the clergy were too busy deciding whether to stand still with the Reformers, or to go back to the Fathers, to have any leisure to spare for the fashioning of adequate new bottles for the new wine.

The Victorians were, in fact, saddled with a religion that had ceased to respond to the demands of the time, and they were practically bankrupt of a philosophy, for the prevailing utilitarianism was only another method of cutting theory and getting down to the task in hand. Macaulay had voiced the view of the age, to the effect that philosophy had turned out to be windy humbug, and that the panacea for all human ills was science, the science that was producing such amazing results before all men's eyes, and whose capabilities for human betterment seemed unbounded.

But what neither Macaulay nor anybody else recognised at the time, was that Victorian science was dangerously lopsided and incomplete. Its most striking advances were in the direction of increasing the power of Man over things, and his knowledge of the material uni-

verse. It also enabled Man to understand and master his bodily processes, to the extent of adding another decade to his average life. But of the study of the inner man, of his mind and spirit, the Victorian age was strangely neglectful. Psychology was the one science that stuck fast in the ancient ruts. Galen had long ago ceased to be cited as an authority in medicine, but Aristotle, as a psychologist, was still almost as much deferred to by Victorian dons as by mediæval schoolmen. Even towards the end of the nineteenth century, the science of mind, such as it was, consisted mainly of barren analysis and resurrection of long deceased authorities, and it received little serious attention.*

Man, in his avidity to master things, had not even faced the necessity of mastering Man. The change in his environment was accompanied by no corresponding change in himself. It was as if he had trusted to that good-natured Deity of his to exempt him, somehow or another, from the law of all life, that the creature must adapt itself to its surroundings, or perish.

What the Victorians did, though without acknowledging it, was to patch up a compromise, that might, at any rate, last out their time. They deliberately avoided any vital or drastic solutions. They had no desire to reconstruct the foundations of society, or to take a new spiritual orientation. They were content to carry on from day to day, and to leave the future for Progress or the Deity to take charge of. They were practical men, and when

*Even in the new 14th edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* philosophy and psychology are lumped together sub-editorially, and the article Psychology is thoroughly in the old high and dry tradition.

everything seemed every day to be getting better and better, they did not see the sense of meeting trouble halfway.

There is something about the Victorian Age that reminds us of that great mansion of Beckford's at Fonthill with its vast proportions and the lavish magnificence of its decorations, but—without foundations. The edifice of Victorian civilisation lacked foundations, not because its builders were knaves, but because, being practical men, they did not bother about such things. Like the Fonthill workmen, who toiled, in relays and by torchlight, all the twenty-four hours, the Victorians went on, adding stone to stone, pausing occasionally to note the ever-increasing height and grandeur of the building, and trusting to some invisible architect for the soundness of the plan.

Even at the height of the Victorian noontide, ominous fissures and subsidences had begun to make themselves apparent, and, as the century went on, they got wider and deeper. The first great shock to Victorian complacency was given by an event that ought to have furnished more food for pride than any other achievement of the age. This was the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, as great a landmark in the progress of biology as Newton's *Principia* had been in that of physics. But Darwin had given the final push to the already shaky throne which the worshippers of the Lord had chosen to erect for him on a pile of Family Bibles. It became obvious to anybody who chose to think, that the seven days' creation, and the Adam and Eve story, were on a par of literal veracity with Jack the Giant Killer. Even the Vic-

torian decency, which had tactfully closed its eyes to the havoc that German scholarship had already made with the literal interpretation not only of the Old, but of the New Testament, was no longer possible to maintain. A howl of orthodox fury went up when grave divines began to evacuate the old *ne plus ultra* positions. For, once the retreat was started, where was it going to end? To-day it was,

“‘You can’t,’ said a Zulu,
‘Believe that, you fool, you!’
‘I don’t,’ said the Bishop of Natal.”

To-morrow it would be Samuel Butler, remarking, “the carriage of Jesus Christ blocks the way.” The faith that went no more than convention-deep, was dissolving in the twilight of no faith at all.

With the Victorian faith went the Victorian morality. A wind blew from France, heavy with strange passions, and it wakened the lyre of Swinburne. The spade that every one had agreed to call an agricultural implement, was now a bloody shovel. Solemn and scarlet sins were trumpeted with evangelical fervour. But fervour was too essential a part of Victorian morality to survive for long the breaking of the chief taboo. The intransigence of Swinburnian passion, and the high seriousness of Meredithian comicality, were followed by a ripple of Butlerian and Shavian laughter, and the suppressed yawn of Oscar Wilde. The course of Victorian morality may be likened to that of a ship that leaves port with a hole in her bottom hastily patched over. There comes a time when she turns turtle, and is seen above the waters com-

pletely inverted. But after a few minutes neither deck nor keel appear—the good ship Morality has turned out to be a coffin ship, and there is nothing from horizon to horizon but a chaos of waters, and perhaps a boat or two battling with the waves, or a few black specks of swimmers.

That ship had treasure in her hold of more value, perhaps, than her own. For with the Victorian morality foundered the moral earnestness and concentration that had been the secret of the God's plenty of Victorian achievement. An age of mental stimulants, of hustle and journalese, had no taste for the semi-religious thoroughness with which the Victorians had carried their longest tasks to completion.

Perhaps the feeling against Darwinism had mingled with it some nobler impulse than that of a super-annuated Lordolatry. The Victorians had thought nobly of Man, and the discovery of his monkey ancestry symbolised to many of them a degraded view of human nature. Carlyle was disgusted even by the spectacle of monkeys in the Zoo. But however unjust it may have been to the biologists and primates to drag them into it, there can be no doubt that, as the century wore to a close, such bracing individualism as that of Mill, and such spirituality as that of the early Carlyle, passed imperceptibly but surely out of date. Man was no longer the image of God; he was no longer fully and completely a man, but a specialist, limited to his own field, a cell in a body, a cog or nut in a machine. His opinions were suggested to him by a press that scarcely made the pretence of convincing his reason; his vote was the weapon

he carried in one of the vast caucus-controlled armies of party warfare. Emerson had proved wrong in saying that when the half gods go the gods arrive. Upon Heaven and Earth the twilight of the half gods had descended, but it was the twilight of evening and not of dawn. Above was the darkness of the Unknowable, below, the machines had made the Earth small, and on it hopped and blinked the Last Man of Zarathustra's vision, who made everything small, the Behaviourist Man, stripped of soul and personality, a mere temporary location for a routine of stimulus and response conditioned by factors that could be known and regulated by methods of exact science. In other words, Man, as the newspaper magnates, the political bosses, the advertising experts, and the amusement purveyors had anticipated the psychologists in concluding, was a machine constructed on rather simple principles. You had only to apply the right kind of stimulus to get whatever response out of him you chose.

To the great Victorians, the truth had been a matter of paramount importance. Tennyson had spoken of man as "battling for the true, the just"; Huxley had denounced "Soapy Sam" for using his great gifts to obscure the truth. But the Victorians would not have been Victorian had they given their whole heart and mind and soul and strength to the quest for the truth, wherever and whatever it might be. They had their reservations, their decencies, to which truth had got to conform. And so, after their time, truth itself followed God and the human soul into the darkness, becoming first a matter of pragmatic convenience, and finally one of complete in-

difference, a mere meaningless sound with no counterpart in reality, which appears to be the gist of the latest Huxley philosophy.*

It is a just nemesis on the Victorians, that any protests against the libels by which their biographies are so freely seasoned, is usually silenced by a reminder that, after all, what you want in a biography is not that it should be literally accurate, but a work of art—the art of fiction. If they had been better lovers of Truth, she would be guarding their memories now.

It was not the Victorian philosophy that was breaking down, but the Victorian social system. Even in the sixties, the middle class was beginning to lose prestige. A new generation of intellectuals was rising in revolt against everything that that class held sacred. Matthew Arnold branded it, indelibly, with the mark of the Philistine. Du Maurier, who had now more material to work upon than Thackeray, renewed the taunt of snobbery. Gilbert, in his songs and operas, was moved to such infectious laughter at little tin bourgeois gods, that the sting of his satire was hardly resented:

“Morality, heavenly link,
To thee I’ll eternally drink!
I’m awfully fond of that heavenly bond,
Morality, heavenly link!”

By the eighties “bourgeois” was becoming a term of positive insult among middle class people with any pretensions to being advanced or genteel.

The fact is that the middle class had begun to lose

* As in Mr. Aldous Huxley’s *Do What You Will*.

faith in its own ideals, and its sturdy self-respect was on the wane. The Dombey and Pickwicks were yielding place to the Veneerings, and a mode of life was being evolved in the new suburbs, whose whole pride and ideal centred on the keeping up of appearances. The strenuous pursuit of conventional gentility, often on cruelly insufficient means, may have something heroic about it, and perhaps our great-grandchildren, when they unearth old copies of *The Maunderer*, and wonder what gluttony of toad-eating can have possessed its readers, may be guilty of the same lack of sympathetic understanding that our age has for the Victorians.

Certainly nothing became the middle class so well in the days of its supremacy, as the way with which, when the time was ripe, it laid that supremacy down. That some sort of a Reform Bill, letting the working class into the franchise, was due, was a matter on which most of the Whig-Liberals were agreed, but it was the genius of Disraeli that made him stake the fortunes of his party on the innate Toryism of the common people. He knew their responsiveness to leadership they could respect, and he divined that the old aristocracy of birth was likely to attract their suffrages more readily than the new aristocracy of money. He had judged rightly, for during the last quarter of the century the balance of power shifted decisively in favour of the Tories.

But like the Romantic he was, he had made one miscalculation. Just as Bolingbroke's ideal of a patriot king had failed to work in the previous century, owing to that king being George III, so Disraeli's ideal of a Tory democracy broke down from lack of leadership. The gen-

tlemen of England had neither the intellect nor the imagination requisite for piloting the Ship of State through those dangerous and uncharted waters into which she had drifted. Such activities would have interfered too much with sport. We must remember that the very business of the nation, as transacted in Parliament, had to accommodate itself to the necessity of setting free legislators to slaughter grouse on the earliest possible day on which this could be done without the interference of the police.

The time was approaching when the old upper class would be scarcely distinguishable. The collapse of English agriculture, long deferred, had become an accomplished fact in the eighties, and the great estates no longer sufficed to maintain their owners in the old dignity. Many a country seat passed into the hands of the new rich, who treated it as an expensive plaything, and had no ties with the soil. The old Queen, as indomitable as ever, maintained her court as the last stronghold of aristocratic exclusiveness, but on the accession of her son, the last barriers were overthrown, and though a House of Lords still played its anachronistic part in the Constitution, its prestige had been fatally undermined by the putting up of the peerage to auction. The new plutocracy was in the driver's seat, and drove even Toryism.

And now the working class, having failed to find leadership outside its own ranks, was beginning to seek it from within. The political struggle of the future was to decide whether the resources of wealth, applied to mass suggestion by the great party machines, could counteract

the preponderance of voting power in the ranks of Labour.

It was not only the upper class that was threatened. By the end of the century signs were apparent that the long period of Victorian prosperity was drawing to a close, that the curve of real wages had touched its highest point. Rival powers were at last beginning to bring their full resources into play, and England would have need of all her energy and imagination if she were to maintain her supply of those goods from abroad that were necessary to her existence. It was a premonition of coming peril that drove Joseph Chamberlain to seek, in tightening the bonds of Empire, new markets for old.

Peril of a more catastrophic nature was threatening not only English but human civilisation. The principles of free government and free trade, for which the Victorian foreign policy had all too fitfully stood, were not those destined to prevail in the new Europe. It was not Cobden but Bismarck who was to call the tune to which the nations danced—and that dance was the Dance of Death. After the fall of Napoleon III, Liberalism was a discredited cause in Europe, and ideals went out of fashion. Even in England there was a reaction to force and Jingoism, until the humiliating experience of the South African War deflated her self-esteem.

But now it was becoming apparent that Nietzsche had been too optimistic when he opined that the Last Man, the product of mechanical civilisation, was indestructible like the ground flea. That creature's machine-created environment had provided him with the means of improving his condition, gradually and by the exercise of

a wisdom beyond that of his fathers, but it had also provided him with the means of easy and rapid suicide. And these means—not having adapted his mind to that new environment—he was determined to put into operation. Happily progress had not gone quite far enough to make war the complete suicide it would have been a decade or two later. It was decreed that mankind should have one more chance, at the eleventh hour, to make good the failure of its fathers to effect the inward and spiritual counterpart of the revolution brought about by the coming of a machine age.

Those of us who are still old-fashioned enough to retain a working faith in free will, have no need to despair. We are not behaviouristic automaton, but men, with souls to save and destinies to command. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy!" cried Bunyan's pilgrim, when Apollyon had beaten him to his knees, "for when I fall I shall arise." And instead of wringing impotent hands over the downfall of that edifice which our fathers wrought so nobly in all but the foundations, let us learn from their failure and take counsel from Goethe:

"Mightier
For the children of men,
Brightlier
Build it again,
In thine own bosom build it anew!
Bid the new career
Commence,
With clearer sense,
And the new songs of cheer
Be sung thereto!"

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THE VICTORIAN SUNSET

The
VICTORIAN
SUNSET

By Esmé
Wingfield-Stratford,
D.Sc., M.A.

New York *Mcmxxxii*
WILLIAM MORROW & CO.

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PREFACE

In *Those Earnest Victorians*, the first volume in this series, I tried to describe the four mid decades of the nineteenth century. In this, I carry on the story to the end of the century and the passing of its most conspicuous figure.

The immense length of the Queen's reign renders the word "Victorian" a little misleading. It would be more convenient if we could speak of the Victorian Age as ending somewhere about 1870, and adopt some new designation—perhaps *fin de siècle*—for the remaining years. Elizabethan is not more different from Victorian than the atmosphere of the Great Exhibition from that of the Diamond Jubilee.

The Victorian Age, in this narrower sense, is a time of unprecedented material progress and a God's plenty of creative genius. But the Victorians were engaged in building up a magnificent superstructure upon the flimsiest of foundations. They aimed at no mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to that brought about in their environment by the use of machinery. Even their discovery of evolution conveyed no warning to them about the fate of every species in the past that has failed to adapt itself to changed conditions. They pinned their faith to change, or, as they called it, progress, and left adaptation for chance or Providence to provide.

By the end of the century, the foundations of Victorianism, such as they were, had quite crumbled away. The building stood, more outwardly magnificent than ever, upon the sand, until the coming of the first tempest. How clouds, already visible, rose

PREFACE

to blacken the whole sky, until, with catastrophic suddenness, came the floods and the whirlwind, it will be for a third volume, *The Victorian Aftermath*, to relate.

May I be permitted to add one thing? It is no part of my design, or of any historian's province, to counsel pessimism. To those who believe in free will as a working principle, the word "inevitable" does not exist. The future is what we chose to make it. But without understanding of the past, and above all, of the immediate past, we are working in the dark and at random. We are like men who have wandered from the path by night into a wilderness beset with perils. It is for history to show us where we are, and how we have got there. It is for us, in that light, to work out our salvation.

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BOOK I
ENGLAND IN 1870

CHAPTER I

THE EUROPEAN SETTING

LOOKING through an album of old—but not so very old—press cuttings, my attention was caught by the following stanza, from a probably Evangelical magazine called the *Prophetic Times* :

Clouds of darkness gathering o'er us
Awful tidings with them bear,
Scenes of misery spread before us,
Death and pestilence and war,
All in one loud, piercing chorus
Warn us that *the end is near*.

If this had appeared at any date subsequent to July 1914, one would have thought no more about it. But who would have imagined that language of this kind was capable of being used by even the most Protestant of Jeremiahs, at the beginning of the eighteen-seventies? If there was ever a time when Englishmen had ground for a robust optimism, it was surely then. And robustly optimistic most of them accordingly were.

I do not suppose that the "end" whose proximity our prophet divined was what we should now call the crash of civilization. It was much more probably that still popular bugbear, "the End of the World", whose advent was as imminent to those versed in such matters as at any time during the past eighteen centuries. But somewhere in the world

events must have been taking place that appeared, to at least one simple soul, strange and ominous enough to form the fitting prelude to that tremendous *finale*.

And indeed things were happening whose full significance was little likely to be appreciated in the quiet country vicarage from which the author of these lines probably hailed. Clouds of darkness lay low along the Southern horizon, and though gathering, had not yet begun to darken the serene English skies. The ordinary Englishman was merely conscious that a war, the last of a series, and one in which he had no particular concern, was running its swift and sensational course. That this war marked the close of an epoch, one of vague and hopeful idealism, and heralded the dawn of another, an iron age of disillusionment and realism, few indeed can have suspected. That it could have brought "the end" appreciably nearer was left for one obscure, and probably foolish, rhymster to tell. Except in very pious circles, it was taken for granted that the state of civilization was getting progressively better and better. When the sun began to cool off, in a few odd million years, it would be time to think about an end.

There certainly seemed to be little enough, in the alarums and excursions South of the Channel, calculated to disturb John Bull's complacency. He had not much more than a sporting interest in the quarrel between Gaul and Teuton, so long, at any rate, as they consented to fight it out on their own territory, and keep their hands off his ancient *protégé* Belgium. It was rather a shock when *The Times* published the draft of a treaty which the French Ambassador had been innocent enough to write down at the suggestion of the Prussian Chancellor, von Bismarck, and which that wily diplomat had taken good care to preserve, whereby the price of German unity was to be the French annexation of

THE EUROPEAN SETTING

Belgium. But England acted with entire dignity and correctness in making it clear that Belgian neutrality must be respected by both combatants impartially.

Opinions and sympathies were divided. The pricking of Napoleon III's bubble empire was not an event likely to excite any too lively regrets. In spite of the fact that he had made friendship for England the corner-stone of his policy, the plotter and dreamer of Soho had never got himself trusted in his capacity of Emperor. Even beneath the crown, he had not ceased to be the seedy adventurer who had gambled himself into a fortune. The next gamble might have taken the form of an invasion. The threat had been thought sufficiently serious to bring thousands of middle-class gentlemen into camp on Wimbledon Common.

And now the last throw had been made, and the gambler rose from the table ruined. That unsubstantial pageant of Empire, the hunts in the royal forests, the fancy-dress balls at which high-born beauties had flaunted their charms with superb defiance of convention, the dalliance, the luxury, had proved to be such stuff as adventurers' dreams are made on—and the dreamer was awake. The Caesar who was too kindly to endure the sight of a battlefield had gone forth for the last time at the head of his legions. The last victory had been staged. The Imperial army, horse, foot and artillery, had descended, in all the panoply of war, upon the town of Saarbrück. The Emperor, on a magnificent charger, his cheeks rouged to hide the pallor of mortal sickness, had ridden beside his boy, the Prince Imperial, into a field of authentic though desultory fire, while the handful of German soldiers in front of them had withdrawn quietly out of harm's way. It was little more than a month later that this same Napoleon had ridden forward alone, in a deliberate attempt to find a hero's death, towards the guns that

were pounding to pieces his trapped army. But destiny had not cast him for that part, so the adventure ended, where it had begun, in England, and as it had begun, with dreams—this time of a fourth Napoleon, the lad baptized in fire at Saarbrück, and fated to a baptism of blood on the point of a Zulu assegai.

There were other dreams that had drifted away on the smoke of the Prussian cannonade. Louis Napoleon had stood—fitfully and imperfectly as an adventurer must—for ideals that had been dear to men of the mid-nineteenth century. He had strutted and fretted before Europe in the part of Liberal Emperor. His Empire had constituted France, in the eyes of Europe, champion of that emotional and mostly middle-class Liberalism that had inspired such different characters as those of Lincoln, Garibaldi, Heine, Gladstone—the range being as wide as that between Mazzini, on the extreme left, and Palmerston, on the equally extreme right. But the Imperial Liberalism had proved but the flimsy and incomplete façade of a structure without foundations, and now façade and building had toppled. It was not only that the Liberal Empire was no more, but that a new spirit had triumphed that had nothing in it of the former romance and idealism.

“Europe”, said a British observer, “has lost a mistress, but gained a master.” The mighty statesman, to whose piping all the Chancellories of Europe were to dance for the next two decades, was not in vain styled the Iron Chancellor. To the superficial observer this lusty junker of the beetling brows and jutting moustachios was a mere reactionary of a divine right that had hedged German princes and princelets since Louis XIV had set the fashion from Versailles. And no doubt divine right suited Bismarck excellently well, so long as it was embodied in a dear old gentleman who could be played, on all

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ordinary occasions, like the joker at cards, though when his wife, or generals, or Protestant conscience, had succeeded in influencing him, he might require a little tactful management. What would happen when the Chancellor came up against a sovereign who not only believed in divine right, but meant to exercise it, the world would see. If he had any mysticism—and there was a streak of it somewhere in his nature—he kept it, with his big dogs and enormous meals, for his private enjoyment. His policy was one of exact and ruthless calculation. Whatever liberties or scruples he had to trample underfoot, it was by blood and iron that he planned and succeeded in placing the crown of united Germany on the unwilling head of his master. It was by consummate finesse that he worked to preserve what the sword had won. For he was the perfect Machiavellian, lion or fox as the situation might demand.

Behind Bismarck was a military machine that not even he could always control. All Europe knew of von Moltke, with his mummy's face, silent in seven languages, who could marshal the whole manhood of Germany and set it irresistibly in motion as if it were all some matter of mechanical calculation. Less was known of an obscure officer of the Napoleonic wars, whose bookish theory von Moltke's success had triumphantly vindicated—von Clausewitz by name, the evangelist of a new gospel destined to capture the civilized world, a gospel not of love but of violence, scientifically applied and unlimited in its application.

Our nameless prophet, if he was premature in asserting that the end was near, might not unplausibly have foreboded its possible beginning in the Franco-German War.

But these things were far from being suspected in peaceful England. The calm surface of national life was unruffled. If sides were taken, it was only as

spectators might back their fancies in the arena. There were one or two hot-heads, notably a certain Frederic Harrison, a propagandist of Auguste Comte's new religion of humanity, who would have had Liberal England fly to the succour of Republican France before Moltke and his machine had crushed the life out of her. But plain Mr. Bull had no ears for such appeals or wish to interfere in his neighbours' quarrels. Let the foreigners fight it out!

A better-known prophet than he of the *Prophetic Times*, Thomas Carlyle, was prolific of reassuring adjectives: "That noble, patient, deep, pious and solid Germany should at length be welded into a Nation and become Queen of the Continent, instead of vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and over-sensitive France," seemed to the hero-worshipper of Frederick the Great, "the hopefulest fact that has occurred in my time". This was no doubt putting it a little strong. France, if she had asked for the trouble that had come to her, by ostensibly picking the quarrel, had at least picked it with a notorious bully—England had not forgotten what measure had been meted to the poor King of Denmark, father of her beautiful Princess of Wales, by that pious old Wilhelm and his Chancellor, and that, too, in the teeth of Lord Palmerston's downright warning that England was not going to stand this sort of thing. In dealing with neighbours so obtuse, John Bull felt that he could take no better advice than that of honest Fluellen, to serve God, and keep out of prawls and prabbles and quarrels and dissensions.

Meanwhile, from a spectator's point of view, the war was good, invested, as it was, with a pomp and military circumstance that had been lamentably absent from that half-civilian brawl of North and South in America. The war-correspondent had at last come to his own and battles were still the spectacular con-

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tests of a day. Paterfamilias could enjoy, with his morning coffee, a veritable prose epic. He could see, through such eyes as those of Archibald Forbes, von Bredow's uhlans and cuirassiers jingling on their glorious death-ride, the Prussian infantry mown down like corn beneath the sickle on the slopes opposite Gravelotte, and the venerable Emperor embracing the Crown Prince, Queen Victoria's handsome son-in-law, while the white flag floated over Sedan, and the strains of *Now thank we all our God* rose from the encircling legions.

It was, as Oscar Wilde might have put it, a gentlemanly game. John Bull applauded, shook his head a little when the Prussian jackboot continued to be applied to a prostrate opponent in order to make him disgorge a couple of provinces, rushed provisions into starving Paris immediately on the conclusion of the siege, gave himself a pat on the back, turned to his ledgers and his Liberal reforms, and dismissed the whole affair from his mind. As for the *Prophetic Times*, that was hardly the kind of nourishment that, even in the best-conducted families, would have been prescribed for weekday consumption.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLATION OF OPTIMISM

John Bull had better things to think about than the troubles of his neighbours. The good man was continually slapping his pockets in an ecstasy, by no means speechless, of self-congratulation. Judged in terms of increasing wealth, and the well-being that wealth brings in its train, his record of material progress for the quarter of a century following the Repeal of the Corn Law in 1846, staggers the imagination with its mounting and multiplying statistics. Exports of British goods, whose nominal value had been actually less in 1840 than in the year of Waterloo, had increased nearly fivefold by 1870. It is stated in Porter's *Progress of the Nation* that the fifties and sixties, the first two decades of Free Trade, exhibit an extraordinary expansion and elasticity. Thanks to improved machinery and a lowering of prices, in which other nations did not share, production was rapidly cheapened in all directions; the efficiency of labour increased even more rapidly than wages, and the profits of manufacturers and merchants kept pace with the rapidly improving conditions of labourers and artisans.¹

It was a record of which a trading and manufacturing nation had every reason to be proud. In so short a space of time no remotely comparable advance had previously been recorded in the annals of any people. Men hardly yet middle-aged must still have had clear memories of that dreadful time, known as the Hungry Forties, when a great part of

¹ 1912 edition, p. 518.

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the labouring population had lived in a state of semi-starvation, when the only answer to their prayer for daily bread might have been vouchsafed in the form of a few swedes or potatoes, and Chartists, in unknown but formidable numbers, had conjured up the bogey of revolution.

Now, in 1870, the Chartist was as extinct as the dodo, and if the capitalist was satisfied with things in general, there is no reason for believing that the worker was in any way discontented. Indeed, he might congratulate himself on having got more, in proportion, out of the general improvement than his boss, for while capital, as reckoned by the interest it would fetch, was growing cheaper and cheaper, wages, as reckoned by what they would buy, showed a fairly continuous and very substantial rise. Human contentment is always relative.' If the workman of to-day were told to revert to the conditions of fifty years ago, it would no doubt move him to rise and mutiny. But he had only the past and not the future as a basis of comparison, and the past was appreciably worse than the present. Who would want to upset an order of society under whose auspices things had, for a generation past, been getting better and better, and might reasonably in the years to come be expected to get better still?

Since Sir Robert Peel had taken his momentous step of repealing the duties upon imported corn, the country had never looked back. British commerce and industry had swept forward from strength to strength, and even unprotected agriculture continued to do remarkably well—the county magnate contrived to maintain his dignity on rising rents, Farmer Giles found himself able to grumble along to the accompaniment of swelling profits, and as for Labourer Hodge, sitting down to his Sunday dinner, his Dad's tales of the Hungry Forties must have seemed as incredible as nightmares. Indeed, by Sir Robert Giffen's estimate,

the average agricultural labourer was consuming, in 1881, more than five times as much food as in 1840. There lingered on a few stern and crusted Protectionists, but their foible had ceased to be taken seriously. The astute Mr. Disraeli, whose political fame had been built on a series of terrific Protectionist philippics against his own party leader, had contrived, now that he had stepped into that leader's shoes, to put Protection unobtrusively on to a shelf from which not even a Tory ministry would show any desire to rescue it.

The leaders of British thought and policy during this period of ever-increasing prosperity, the Brights and Roebucks, the Mills and Gladstones, were inspired less by a spirit of calculation than one of faith. This was none the less ardent from the fact that few of its possessors had the mediæval habit of crystallizing faith in dogma. They preserved a decent mystery, even to themselves, about the sources of their mysticism.

They had before them a spectacle, unprecedented in history, of life revolutionized by science. The old gentleman of 1870 looked back to the days when he had been rattled up to town, for a few hectic weeks of Corinthian *sprees* and *rambles*, in one of those marvellous high-speed coaches that had covered the Macadam at ten, twelve, fifteen miles an hour, and had seemed so immeasurably advanced beyond the rambling and lumbering conveyances of the eighteenth century. And now the roads were deserted, save for an occasional tradesman's cart or gig; the villages no longer echoed to the toot of the horn, and the inns had sunk to the status of local pubs. But the landscape had meanwhile been transformed by the new iron roads with their cuttings and viaducts, on which sixty miles an hour was less remarkable than fifteen had been in the most advanced coaching days. The distance between Edinburgh and London had shrunk to a summer day's journey.

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No less sensational was the conquest of wind and tide. By 1870, three-quarters of British shipping tonnage was propelled by steam, and the miracle of Elisha, of making iron float, had become so much a matter of ordinary routine, that five-sixths of British construction was of this metal.¹ The sailing ship died hard; the mid-century was the time of beautiful clippers, that raced each other home from China, and finished, on one famous occasion, neck and neck in the Thames, but the cutting of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave the steamer eastward bound, and proceeding by a providentially arranged series of British coaling-stations, a winning advantage. At no time could it have been affirmed so confidently that Britannia ruled the waves. Her twelve-hundred-thousand tons of shipping, in 1870, exceeded by more than a clear million that of her next competitor, the United States.

It was not only by means of railways that the face of the country-side had suffered change. In the districts where coal and iron were most readily available the new towns, or "wens" as Will Cobbett had been rude enough to call them, continued to expand with bewildering rapidity, and to house a steadily increasing proportion of the wage-earning class. In the textile, as in most leading industries, machinery had exterminated the old handicraft, and yet machinery continued to improve and the factories grew bigger, and more airy and brighter, altogether different from the hells of choking vapour and unfenced machinery to which bosses and foremen, strap in hand, had driven food-starved and sleep-starved children in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. These grotesque horrors were now less *en evidence*, thanks to legalized factory inspection and a steadily strengthening trades-unionism, though the condition of many employees in the chain-making or white lead industries, or the small, sweated tailoring establish-

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Art. "Shipping".

ments in the East End, touched the lowest depths of human misery. But you cannot make Progress without sacrificing a few victims, nor could sensible men expect to reform everything in a moment. The broom that had swept the big spaces would no doubt soon clear up these dark corners. The need was for more and not less progress.

More machines! More inventions! Bigger and busier towns! More and more hands propagated to set the wheels going! The last pound of capital mobilized by the Limited Liability Company, the last shilling by Savings Bank, even the child's copper diverted from the sweet shop to the village Penny Bank! This was Progress. The average British citizen surveyed the world that he was in process of making, and found it very good. There were figures to prove it, and anyone who chose to audit them would find them no less correct than convincing.

A certain difference in appearance between Salford and Florence might no doubt raise questions of taste on which every one was free to enjoy his own opinion, and Matthew Arnold, with irritating irrelevance, might interrupt Mr. Roebuck, Radical Member for Sheffield, who was contributing his quota to the general thanksgiving, by reading out of the newspaper "Wragg is in custody"—Wragg being a poor girl who, having left Nottingham workhouse with her illegitimate child, was believed to have strangled it on the Mapperley Hills—and remarking that by the Ilissus there had been no Wragg. Mr. Roebuck might easily have retorted that neither was there a Hagnon by the Trent—a name at least as uncouth as Wragg to English ears—and that Socrates had been in custody, which was a lot worse than Wragg. This sort of thing led nowhere. But figures and statistics of prosperity were things that could not be gainsaid, and all these unshakable witnesses announced—as the seer of the *Prophetic Times* would

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have put it—"in one loud, piercing chorus", that modern Progress had succeeded and was succeeding in making all things better and better, especially for John Bull and his workshop of the world.

What then do we mean when we repeat that these frock-coated optimists were in a deeper sense men of faith than of calculation? This—that they justified Progress by figures and imagined that it could be so justified, because they had first accepted it in their hearts. It never occurred to them that the results of science and invention could be anything but beneficent, or that the trend of modern civilization could be in any but an upward direction. The faster the world kept moving, the nearer it would get to perfection. The possibility that all things might be working together, not for Utopia but for a crash, would have seemed too fantastic to be so much as thought of.

A person with a reasonable amount of property or in secure employment must have felt—apart from his purely private or family affairs—little enough cause for disturbed slumbers. Of course, if he happened to be of a speculative turn of mind, and liked to go in for a high rate of interest, he must take his risks like a man. The course, even of expanding commerce, did not always run smooth. At fairly regular intervals, over-confidence would be followed by a smash, as in that disastrous affair of Overend and Gurney's Bank in '66, and then, instead of 6 or 7 or 10 per cent, income and capital would vanish together. Somehow the business men did not seem to have that perfect control over their machine of credit that might have been expected of such hard-headed individuals. They would allow it to race until the bearings were red-hot and an explosion or breakdown threw it out of gear, and then, after a great deal of loss and damage, things would be got going again, and the whole process would recom-

mence. But even at the worst, the investor's lot was far less unhappy than it had been before the new Limited Liability principle had been put into practice. He at least only stood to lose his own stake in the venture, and, when the company smashed, did not find himself, jointly with his fellow shareholders, liable for the whole of its debts.

But these troubles were only for the bold. The old lady and the retired tradesman, with their savings in gilt-edged, had no cause to quake or quiver. Such tragedies as that of Miss Matty, in *Cranford*, who lost her little all by the failure of a local bank, were of much rarer occurrence. There was no need to bank locally, and the great London banks, with their local branches extending all over the country, provided a security as great, for all practical purposes, as that of Threadneedle Street. The only fly in the ointment consisted in the fact that perfect safety went along with low rates of interest. So much capital was competing for employment that supply tended to outrun demand. But this, after all, was the surest sign of an abounding prosperity.

"Safe as the Bank" was the proverbial yoke-fellow of "True as the Gospel"—though there were professors, at godless Tübingen, who dared aver that the Gospel was not so true after all. But so far no one, out of Bedlam, had ever hinted at scepticism about the safety of the Bank. Nor did anybody dream of doubting that in spite of booms and panics, fluctuations and depressions, the great body of savings would be safe, and dividends would continue to materialize, at stated intervals, like the manna from Heaven.

The most nervous property-holder could indeed say of the social order, "I feel the bottom, and it is good." How, indeed, could there by any human possibility be a collapse? Was it by war? France, the only conceivable opponent capable of threatening vital

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injury, had been knocked out of the running for a good many years to come. As for the Germans, they were kinsmen and traditional allies, and as they had no navy to speak of, their victorious legions might as well have been in Mars. A saying of Moltke's was soon to pass into currency to the effect that even though, by a surprise raid, he might land 50,000 men in England, he had not the least notion of how he should get them out again. Britannia ruled the waves; never, during the centuries that her shores had been inviolate, had they been so perfectly secure. There was Russia, of course, but one knew what a war with Russia was like, and it was a venture to which the principle of limited liability was known to apply. The spectacle of Cossacks in Piccadilly was not sufficiently imaginable even for a nightmare.

The prospect of a revolution was even more fantastic. Never had there been less apparent discontent. In the cartoons of the time, the workman appears as a respectable and bearded figure, surmounted by a queer little paper box of a cap, and usually rebuking some agitator. Now that he was admitted into the partnership of the franchise, what had the fellow got to grumble at? What, indeed, could he want more than he had got? Few people in England had heard of a formidable old gentleman, with the appearance of a Hebrew prophet, who had written an enormous treatise, in German, inciting to a class war of world-wide extermination. That the vote should be used by one class to expropriate another was as fantastic as the idea of Cossacks in Piccadilly. What was it but a means of giving a majority of citizens the choice between being governed by Mr. Disraeli or Mr. Gladstone? The workman had planked for Gladstone—and what frock-coated city man could have done more?

CHAPTER . III

ROYALTY

In the early part of the century, it would have been a very supple courtier who would have fixed upon the English Royal House as likely to outlast the magnificent dynasties of the Continent. Indeed, there had been one time when it had seemed more than probable that the days of English royalty were numbered. After the fourth George and his brother,

Princes, the dregs of their dull race who flow
Mud from a muddy spring,

the chances of the country tolerating another sovereign of the same kidney would have been faint indeed. If there is really a divine Providence that intervenes on behalf of its Anointed, it acted in the nick of time when it replaced these disreputable uncles by a young girl, who, if her early diaries are anything to go by, must have combined a strong will with a singularly engaging disposition.

And now that girl had become a stout widow of over fifty, and looking older, who was veiled from her subjects' sight in the cloud of gloom that never lifted over remote Balmoral. It was nine years, now, since her first frantic cry of bereaved grief had echoed through the state apartments of Windsor; that grief was only the more hopeless now from being silent. The situation was strange beyond precedent. From the standpoint of the ordinary citizen, the monarchy had ceased to function. What did he know of the long hours spent by the Queen at her desk, supervising all the intricate business of state-

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craft, and making herself a presence to be felt and known by her ministers? A losing fight, perhaps, against the omnipotence of party cabinets, but one maintained, to the end, with unyielding spirit.

The man in the street harboured a not unintelligible grievance against his Sovereign. She was, partly at his expense, drawing a fabulous income, and to this he would have had no objection, if she had only made a fair return by devoting it to the purposes for which it was intended. He wanted to have a court, and all that a court implies in the way of ceremonial and pageantry. It is the business of monarchy to provide its public with the most popular of all shows, and the taxpayer felt that, having paid for his ticket, he might, after nine years' waiting, reasonably expect to see the doors opened. It was not only a question of entertainment. The suspension of court life was a heavy blow to trade—one cartoon of the time depicts a lamentable scene of a court milliner and her assistants in the last depths of unemployed despair.

It was hard, but not altogether unnatural, that the Queen should have been the target for a good deal of criticism, most of it couched in respectful terms, but some of it scurrilous to the point of open disloyalty. The Prince of Wales provided lampoonists with a convenient foil, and he would be represented as giving his mother a most undutiful piece of his mind. It was worse when gossip fastened unashamedly on to the Queen's private life. Now that dear Uncle Leopold of Belgium had followed Albert to the grave, she had no equal in whom she could confide, and it was but human that she should have prized, perhaps extravagantly, the simple loyalty of a retainer, the big gillie, John Brown. The little, lonely woman, with her life never safe from assassination, must have felt the need for a protector such as Brown proved himself to be, when he collared a

youth, who, otherwise unperceived, had got with a pistol to the window of the royal carriage. As in the way with old retainers, Brown's loyalty was seasoned with an engaging candour—he would, when the day was cold, insist on his mistress wearing a shawl—"Ye'll just put it on,"¹ he would say, wrapping it round her. Such a relationship between mistress and servant was not without a certain beauty, but, for the more discontented among her subjects, any stick was good enough to beat an absentee Sovereign. The most improbable absurdities were passed from mouth to mouth, and even got into print. . . . John Brown, lolling at the Queen's side, with his boots upon the mantelpiece, and the Prince of Wales standing in disgusted impotence upon the hearth-rug. The man whom the Queen delighted to honour . . . to what extent being a matter that only the winner in a competition of scandal could determine!

And yet, despite these unsavoury murmurings, the retirement to Balmoral, so far from weakening the Queen's prestige, had the ultimate effect of immensely enhancing it. The woman was on her way to become a goddess, and like so many deities of the ancient world, retired for a season out of human ken. Balmoral was the underworld from which she was destined to arise in full apotheosis, a mother of nations, a symbolic figure raised far above ephemeral controversy or criticism. Up to the time of her husband's death she had had to stand, like any other woman, on her real or supposed merits. She had stood the test surprisingly well, embodying, as she did, just those womanly qualities most prized in an age of romantic respectability. But her popularity had not been unalloyed, and her German husband, in spite of his many sterling qualities, had never found a key to unlock English hearts. It was necessary

¹ *The Hardman Papers*, edited by S. M. Ellis; p. 177.

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for the wilful, impetuous Victoria to fade out of memory, in order that the ideal form of the Queen Empress might be free to assume its proper and superhuman lineaments in the mind's eye of her peoples.

Even while the retirement lasted, criticism never came within measurable distance of menacing the stability of the throne. No doubt there were a few scattered Republicans and even Republican clubs. But to the average Englishman, the monarchy symbolized that permanence amidst change which gave him such an enviable feeling of security. Besides, he was chivalrous and sentimental, and the thought of a lonely widow, heartbroken in her bereavement, gave him the same catch in the breath as the rendering of *Home, Sweet Home* on a musical-box.

Moreover, the Royal Family had acquired that faculty of producing the right person at the right moment that has stood them in such good stead during the past century. If the star of Victoria was under eclipse, that of the Prince of Wales was in the ascendent. The upbringing of this young man had caused his parents grave and not unreasonable anxiety; the record of Princes of Wales had not been a happy one, and Victoria must have remembered what sort of a progeny had issued from the virtuous loins of George III. The sequel to another "Prinny" would be a republic. The royal couple knew nothing of repressions and complexes, and went about their task of education with the direct purpose of controlling every moment of their son's life according to a schedule drawn up by the father. Nor, in spite of the ridicule which it is customary to lavish on this scheme, was it by any means fruitless. Though it signally failed to kindle the love of books or to quench that of pleasure, it did at least implant a high sense of duty, reinforced by a capacity for work, that made a world of difference

between Edward VII and such crowned wasters as George IV.

Even in the staid sixties, it was not an unmixed evil that the young Prince's reputation had so little in common with that of his father. Too strait-laced a deportment has never made for the popularity of English princes. There have been no more popular sovereigns than the fifth and eighth Henrys, the fourth Edward, and the second Charles. The Royal Martyr, on the other hand, had been, like the saintly Henry VI, the pattern of monogamous virtue, while George III had only been allowed to acquire popular merit when he had arrived at the stage of being the "good old king". Accordingly, when Disraeli coined the nickname "Prince Hal", it was in no ill-natured spirit. An heir apparent with a spark of wildness in his disposition was just what the nation needed to relieve the gloom of Balmoral.

How far the popular idea of the Prince was founded on fact is a matter of no historical interest. Probably the stories about him that were told on the boulevards, and confided in the seclusion of smoking-rooms, were wildly exaggerated. There is no more valued social *cachet* than intimate and scandalous knowledge about royal personages, and where such knowledge does not exist it must be invented. It is difficult for a royalty to pay the least attention to an attractive woman without it being assumed—often for purposes of bawdry—that she is his mistress. It was only on two occasions that the Prince's name was associated with any public scandal, and on each his character was triumphantly vindicated. A loyal discretion will leave it at that.

But the Prince's place in the popular imagination is a thing that no historian can afford to neglect. He stood, like George IV in his Carlton House days, as the first gentleman in the nation, the arbiter of such fashionable elegances as his age would permit.

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And his popularity was immensely enhanced by that of his beautiful Danish wife, whose arrival in England had been the excuse for a veritable riot of loyalty, several people having been trampled to death in the course of the festivities. It is curious that the Prince's reputation as a man of pleasure did not detract from that of Sandringham as a model of all that a happy home ought to be.

This marriage had one very important effect, in breaking the German tradition of English royalty. Ever since the accession of the Hanoverian Guelphs, it had been *de rigueur* that their legitimate unions should be with scions of the other august and prolific Teutonic houses. The domestic atmosphere of the Court was quite as much German as English. To her husband the Queen had been Liebchen and Fräuchen; her daughter Helena was Lenchen. The Queen herself—though she had no love for Bismarck and his Prussian jackboot—was ardently pro-German. The welcome accorded to Princess Alexandra gained something of its extraordinary intensity from a reaction against this undiluted Teutonism in high places.

Alexandra had no cause to love the nation that, only a year after her marriage, had fallen with overwhelming force upon her father's small kingdom and robbed it of two provinces. And perhaps some subconscious resentment of his own father's domination may have already imparted an anti-German bias to the husband's sympathies. Whatever was the cause, the Prince's spiritual home was far to the west of the Rhine. Despite his guttural accent, he was a Parisian in everything but birth. The most critical of cities understood and accepted him. That acceptance, in due time, was to change the course of history.

Even Disraeli can hardly have realized, when he coined the nickname "Prince Hal", in what its real point consisted. For that Prince had developed into

the only English Sovereign to make a conquest of Paris. And Edward VII's conquest was to have more important results than that of Henry V.

Sovereigns in England are symbols of permanence, but the traditional rôle of their heirs is to be associated with such a measure of change as the Blood Royal feels it safe to tolerate. Edward VII was no exception to the rule. He did not, like his great-uncle George, aspire to be associated with any political party—the conjunction of Albert Edward and Gladstone would not be easy to visualize. The Queen was jealously determined to keep the whole political power of the throne in her own hands, and not to trust her son with the least inner knowledge or responsibility. The Prince—loyally, though not without some regret—accepted the situation. The deprivation would have been more severe had the natural bent of his disposition been political. But in politics his interest was that of an amateur; in the social sphere he exercised a mastery that had in it less of birth than of genius.

His temperament eminently fitted him for such a rôle. In the jargon of modern psychology, one would characterize him as an extrovert. We do not think that his most intimate biographer of the future will be able to make much of his inner life. Solitude bored him, and it was hardly ever that he was to be seen with a book in his hand. He was a man of pleasure in the fullest sense, for he required to be perpetually amused and stimulated—the spectre of *ennui* was ever at his elbow. Witty conversation, light opera, the excitements of racing and pigeon-shooting, the thrills of the baccarat table, the society of attractive women, were among the expedients he was perpetually seeking to keep that spectre from gripping him. In the chase of pleasure, Nimrod is not always to be distinguished from Actæon.

But in this very weakness the strength of Albert

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Edward was made perfect. To an environment of perpetual stimulus—such as only one in his position could command—he displayed a marvellous power of adaptation. If he read in no other book, he was deeply versed in that of life. Since he could never afford himself leisure for reflection, he was fain to trust to his instincts, and these were sharpened to a point of fine discrimination that is the quintessence of tact. The very fact that he looked only outward and never within, gave him an understanding interest in those with whom he was brought into contact ; every new face impressed itself indelibly on his memory, and he developed that feel of his audience that enabled him, like Charles II, to find the exactly appropriate thing to say or do on every occasion. Such a temperament may be superficial—those who find deep statesmanship or mature wisdom in Edward VII are substituting loyalty for evidence—but there comes a point at which even superficiality may have some of the effects of genius.

It was a matter of no small importance that the heir to the throne should have stood in the nation's eye as a man of pleasure. This in itself was a highly significant breach with Victorian tradition. Among the all-powerful Middle Class that ruled the country between the first two Reform Bills, pleasure itself—quite apart from any question of its guilt or innocence—had acquired a bad name. It was not only a form of unproductive activity, but it was notoriously calculated to provoke the wrath of the Lord. Heaven only knew what vials might not be poured upon the heads of original sinners who presumed to dodge Adam's curse by enjoying themselves. For some time past there had been a disposition, in certain quarters, to challenge the shibboleths of respectability. That dreadful young Swinburne—or Swineborn, as Mr. Punch called him—corrupting the morals of youth . . . girls who went to *Traviata* . . .

and now the Prince, with his Marlborough House Set, giving the sanction of a hitherto respectable Royalty to the pursuit of sin, or at any rate, of pleasure, which, as every good Puritan knew, amounted to the same thing.

In 1870 the worst fears of the unco' guid seemed to be justified. The Prince appeared in a divorce case; a jealous husband forced him into the witness-box; his letters to the accused and—as it happened—insane lady were publicly read. They did, indeed, turn out to be such letters as the Prince Consort himself might have addressed to an elderly governess, and Albert Edward left the box amid a general wonder why he had ever had to go there. But it was a well-known principle of Victorian morality that even to be concerned with a scandal is as bad as guilt. For the next few years the hounds of Puritanism were unleashed upon the Prince; his character, and even his fitness to reign, were openly assailed in pamphlets that enjoyed a huge circulation. But Victorian respectability was already undermined. The cult of pleasure was destined to become as fashionable as that of virtue had been in the sixties. Moreover, the Prince, recovering from an almost fatal illness in the winter of 1871-2, occasioned an outburst of loyal enthusiasm that showed how unassailable was his popularity and that of the Throne with the great body of the nation.

Even the Queen had been enticed out of her seclusion for this great act of thanksgiving, and all her sons and unmarried daughters were there. There, too, was the lovely Alexandra, leading by the hand "little Georgie"—the future George V. The whole of London's millions seemed to be lining the streets. All the lavishly decorated way from Buckingham Palace to St. Paul's there was one continuous and deafening roar of cheering, with the bands thundering out *God Save the Queen* and *God Bless the Prince of*

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Wales. The Prince, still very weak and a little lame, had tears in his eyes, as, with his mother leaning on his arm, he passed up the Cathedral steps at the head of the procession. Victoria's observant eye, in spite of the emotion of the moment, noted that "the interior fell rather flat after the exterior. It so badly lacks decoration and colour. It was stiflingly hot . . . the service appeared to me too cold and long." And then back by another way, through the same deafening roar, even the trees being full of people, which, the Queen was afraid, must have been very dangerous for some of them. Poor, ruined, dying Napoleon III, who had kindly been allowed to come to the Palace to see what he could of the festivities, must have had some strange reflections on the difference between Cockney and Parisian loyalty.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CHARMED CIRCLE

The Marlborough House Set was helping to bring about a change in the structure as well as the spirit of Victorian society. For the Prince of Wales had more liberal notions than his mother concerning the company that it behoved Royalty to keep. His zest for life had the effect of making him a realist, and his pursuit of its good things was not to be checked by stiff German prejudices about rank and invisible barriers. There was no refuge from the hunter, *ennui*, in the society of our old nobility. Life, in those usually over-ornate mansions, had its *tempo*, a ponderous *adagio*, that was not to be quickened by the arrival even of the heir to the throne. One noble Duke even went so far as to put down his foot about the high stakes for which it was proposed to play under his roof.

Albert Edward therefore chose for his intimates those who amused or interested him. He had also, being a realist, a keen business instinct, and fully realized what advantages might accrue from intimacy with those who pulled the wires of international finance. It was the Queen's German way to keep her court rigidly exclusive and aristocratic. But during the retirement to Balmoral, that court was in a state of suspended animation. It was the Prince who gave the tone to fashionable society. And his action in throwing open the doors of Marlborough House to encroaching plutocracy was the first sign of change in the old order of upper-class society.

That order had stood firm beyond expectation

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during the first half of the reign. There were many who had seen in the Reform Bill of 1832 the beginnings of an avalanche destined to sweep away the nobility, the Church, and the Throne. But the House of Lords continued on its placid way; the great political families, Russells, Cavendishes, Stanleys, were as well represented as ever in high office. In what Mrs. Hemans called "the stately homes of England", the old pomp and dignity suffered little abatement. Livered and powdered men-servants flourished, despite the gibes of Radical satirists. Such imposing functionaries as Grooms of the Chambers figured among the domestic staffs of the higher nobility. A lord was still very much of a lord, inspite of the fact that his costume partook of the universal dinginess and that his longer journeys were performed in a common train. Even so, he did not always yield without a struggle to the levelling influence of steam. At Berkhamsted station we can still see the specially built apartment, with its private entrance, in which Lord Brownlow elected to await his train, in seclusion from the common herd of passengers.

It is almost incredible, nowadays, that the great Scottish Radical, Thomas Carlyle, could have allowed himself and his ailing wife to be packed, by their hostess, Lady Ashburton, into a second-class carriage, along with the lady's maid and family doctor, on their journey to Scotland, while her Ladyship retired to the secluded luxury of her first-class saloon.

Two incidents may serve to illustrate the persistence of this lordly tradition. In 1875 there was widespread indignation because the Earl of Darnley had ejected from a farm on his Cobham estate the Mayor of the neighbouring town of Gravesend, the alleged cause being that functionary's refusal to make his son resign a commission in the West Kent Yeomanry, of which his Lordship was colonel, and in which it was his pleasure to create a vacancy.

In the following year the Duke of Portland was unfortunate enough to incur a fine of five pounds, for letting loose on the Queen's highway a locomotive engine, without a man to walk at least sixty yards in front of it with a red flag, to warn such of her Majesty's subjects as happened to be deaf of the monster's approach. The money duly changed hands, but not before his Grace's steward and representative in court, a certain Mr. Cripple, had treated the Bench to the following impressive warning :

"Gentlemen, I bow to your decision, but I am sure the Duke will be very much dissatisfied."

It must not be forgotten that even in the mid-seventies, such latter-day feudalism had a sound, economic basis. So long as land continued to pay, its inheritors had little to fear for their dignity.

Both in the country and the West End, the exclusiveness of society was still fairly maintained, though with increasing difficulty. A London season in the crinoline days, though it might strike a modern debutante as the limit in slowness, must have had a charm of its own that has faded beyond recall. "London Society", according to Lady Dorothy Nevill, "was more like a large family than anything else." Its numbers were limited, and within its pale everybody, more or less, knew everybody else. There was consequently far less than nowadays of social pushfulness and competition, and more, probably, of real enjoyment. One did not hurry over one's pleasures. It was a sign of imperfect breeding to arrive at dances at anything like the time they were supposed to begin—too early arrivals might be ushered into an empty ballroom and informed that the family was still at dinner. There were leisurely dinner-parties, at which the art of conversation still flourished, and for the older generation, still more leisurely whist.

The aristocratic standards of mid-Victorian society set much less account by luxury than those of the

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plutocracy that has succeeded it. The true aristocrat not infrequently rules his life by Nietzsche's precept, "be hard"—the Duke of Wellington sleeps and dies on his austere camp bedstead, and the Emperor Francis Joseph slaves out his declining years in the ugliest, dingiest, and worst-furnished apartment of magnificent Schönbrunn. It is difficult to associate any idea of comfort with those bleak, stucco-fronted town houses, which are now being pulled down and replaced by luxurious flats as fast as the leases fall in. From the Arctic stone or marble of the entrance hall, where the officiating footman lurked under an enormous canopy of funereal leather, to the second- or third-floor bedrooms, whither perspiring housemaids hauled cans of hot water from the sunless basement by a *via dolorosa* of whitewashed backstairs, these grand houses were abodes of Little Ease and not unfrequently of Little Health, for the drains—brick, under the drawing-room floor—if out of sight, were not always out of smell.

What was called, and censured as, luxury in those days, turns out to be most frequently what we should call display. Extravagantly elaborate dresses in which it must have been hard to sit down and painful to move, magnificent jewels, number and gorgeousness of men-servants, were the chief pomps and vanities for which worldly young women bartered their charms in the marriage market.

The very severity with which even the innocent party to a scandal was visited, was not entirely due to hypocrisy. Mr. E. F. Benson cites the case of Lady Henry Somerset, who, having discovered some infidelity of her husband's, publicly and dramatically left him, and thereby—though there was no doubt of Lord Henry's guilt—incurred social ostracism. She had no doubt vindicated her honour, but she had betrayed her class. She was like a soldier who, on account of some just grievance against his superior,

deserts his post in face of the enemy. At all costs, the dignity of Society must be maintained and an immaculate exterior presented to the world.

But for some time it must have been apparent that in England, least of any country, could social barriers be permanently maintained. England might be described as a country that has gone off the birth standard. There were individual noblemen, but no such thing as a noble caste, rigidly defined by blood or quarterings. Consequently "Society", like an unconvertible pound, might be "pegged" for the moment, but could not be stabilized permanently at a dictated level. Sooner or later, social values must conform to money values.

The fact that money was to so small an extent considered a passport to "Society" during the fifties and sixties was not unconnected with the overflowing incomes that still ensured from the possession of broad acres. A great landowner, unless he chose to dissipate his fortune on the turf, was almost invariably opulent, and had no very obvious inducement to court the advances of the newly rich. It was one of the assumptions of "Society" that money was so plentiful as to be no object to anyone. A lady of fashion would almost as soon have been seen naked as in a bus; even a hansom would have been thought a little degrading.

Aristocratic society is based upon an unwritten compact to maintain a certain standard of manners and conduct within its pale. To this end wealth is merely a means, it is only in a plutocracy that it is regarded as an end in itself. The plutocrat never ceases to be conscious of his monetary assets, because his social value is determined by them, and he therefore seeks to exploit them to the uttermost. But to the man of breeding money is only valuable to the extent that he is enabled to forget its existence. Love of money is quenched by possession, and thus ceases to be a root

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of evil. It is by such freedom to live up to its chosen standards of life that an aristocracy justifies its existence.

But it is not enough merely to be true to one's standards. The question arises of how far these particular standards may be worth maintaining. It was Disraeli who coined the phrase, "men of light and leading". What sort of light and leading was it that those within the pale of London Society and "the county set" were giving to the rest of the nation?

Much could be counted to them for righteousness. What Tennyson had characterized as the "grand old name of gentleman" stood for something distinctively English—among the proudest Continental aristocracies there was nothing quite its equivalent. The gentleman was one who lived among his people and shared their interests and amusements. Much of his time, and some of his money, were devoted to free service, whether as magistrate, or high sheriff, or—what was equally prized—by providing and financing sport. He was divided by no caste barriers from other mortals—the word "*canaille*" had no equivalent in adult English—though public schools, and even universities, clung to such epithets of ancient scorn as "chaws", "touts", and "cads", with all the intolerance of youth.

Much more than in the eighteenth century could it have been said of the English gentleman that he was a man without his price. There was never a higher standard of public honesty. The slightest suspicion on his personal honour was enough to wreck a public man's career. Lord Chancellor Westbury, a self-made man and one of the most brilliant lawyers of his time, was forced in 1865 to resign the Seal, for conduct which was certainly not corrupt, and could, at the worst, have been described as somewhat lacking in delicacy. Those to whom the word Marconi

recalls other than wireless associations, will not need to be reminded of the startling increase of Parliamentary tolerance in our own century.

The willingness of a bourgeois, and even a democratic electorate, to be governed by the descendants of those who had ruled the roost in the days of rotten boroughs, was largely based upon the faith that these privileged persons were free from so much as the temptation to put interest before duty. The otherwise inexplicable trust reposed in the bovine, yawning Duke of Devonshire, was due to the belief that so wealthy a nobleman could never be anything but disinterested. It is doubtful whether certain of the Prince's friends, though endowed as liberally with wealth and far more liberally with brains, would have commanded precisely this sort of confidence.

There was much that smacked of the Pharisee in the determination of the upper class to confront the world with a façade of unsullied respectability. But the assumption that a gentleman would sooner die than condescend to crooked, or a lady to impure ways—though it may have been responsible for all sorts of repressions and hypocrisies—did beyond doubt tend to enforce a high standard of conduct. The penalties for any sort of association with any sort of scandal were so terrific, that few were hardy enough to run the risk. Many a marriage that would have been wrecked, in our own day, on the rock of incompatibility, resolved itself into a not unhappy partnership, because both parties realized that there was no tolerable alternative to making good. And a public career was so vulnerable to the least imputation of misconduct, that a gentleman would as soon have thought of feathering his own nest at politics or on the bench, as of cheating at cards. The worst he would do would be to use his influence and patronage in order to obtain public appointments and the cure of

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Christian souls for whom he would. But this was corruption that did not happen to be recognized as corrupt. Nor were all forms of mass-corruption, for public, and not for personal ends, on the index of prohibited activities. Not a little of sharp practice was accounted fair in political war.

A high standard of political and personal honour is much, but not all that is comprehended in light and leading. We look to an aristocracy for a standard of manners and culture, and we may fairly ask how far this requirement was fulfilled by the mid-Victorian upper class. As regards manners, the verdict must be on the whole favourable, though not without qualification. Victorian manners, at their best, were marked by what can best be described as a spaciousness of courtesy, that is only the product of a leisured and secure existence. This courtesy was tempered by the stubborn individualism, frequently degenerating into eccentricity, of the national temperament. The urbanity of the English *grand seigneur* differed from that of the cultured Parisian, who did not feel himself under the same necessity of saying or doing anything he pleased.

It is said of one aged peer, one of the last survivals into the eighties from the preceding century, that he once caused some mild sensation among his guests at a dinner party, by rising without warning from his chair at the head of the table, and, raising his glass with a formal bow to his wife, an old lady more gracious than intellectual, proposing, to the embarrassment of the whole company, the following toast :

“May the Lord preserve you—and *wisen* you !”

In masculine intercourse there were occasions when too much French polish would have been considered unmanly. Masters of hounds derived positive kudos from the indulgence of uncontrolled tempers, a privilege not always recognized by foreign members of the field, nurtured in the duelling tradition. The

absorption of the English gentry in country life and pursuits could hardly fail to impart a certain bucolic or provincial tinge to their manners.

Even those brilliant men about town, who made an art of talking and were the autocrats of dinner tables—a diminishing class even in 1870—were not exactly what we should now call perfect specimens of urbanity. Of the most famous of them all, Bernal Osborne, it is said that much of his wit was ill-natured, aiming, like that of Whistler, at humiliating or scoring off some victim. Besides, such autocrats had a way, that would hardly be tolerated nowadays, of monopolizing the whole conversation.

In praising Victorian manners, it must not be forgotten that their scope was limited to an extent that is difficult to realize in our more democratic age. The small minority within the pale regarded themselves as superior beings to the vast majority without, and made no effort whatever to conceal it. No doubt the bond between a landowner and his dependants could be one of deep and mutual affection. But then there was always the underlying assumption that the great man's will was, in the last resort, supreme. Under the most free-handed, it was often as much as a tenancy was worth to be suspected of Radical leanings, or to dabble in the new-fangled agricultural trades-unionism. The limits of gentility were far more strictly drawn than nowadays. A doctor, unless he were a very famous specialist, the family lawyer, with his stove-pipe hat and rather rusty frock-coat, though treated with respect, were not likely to be seen at the Hall except alone and on professional business. Half the families whose descendants form the present-day county set, would not have been considered fit to be called upon in 1870.

What surprises one, nowadays, is not so much what we should now consider the arrogance of the upper class, as the tolerance of it by its victims. It is with

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mixed feelings that we hear of Carlyle referring to that same Lady Ashburton, who had treated him, at the height of his literary fame, together with his hardly less brilliant wife, in the light of superior servants, as "the greatest lady of rank I ever saw, with the soul of a princess and captainess"—"captainess" is a good word in the mouth of this non-commissioned volunteer in her company. And to come to the class from which Carlyle himself had sprung, we have no evidence that the wage-earners, as a whole, resented the affable condescension implied in such habitual forms of address as "my man", "my good fellow", and "my good woman", or that mutinous feelings were excited among the vast army of domestic servants by the curious fact that a Caroline or a Percy, if they entered service, would have to discard these too genteel names for one of a list which included the royal Jane and William, and the sacred Mary.

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CHAPTER V

LEADING WITHOUT LIGHT

So much for manners in the conventional sense. But what of the inward and spiritual manners that "makyth man", the way or style of life which is the subject of the Winchester motto? We know how Matthew Arnold settled the question, to his own satisfaction, by including the whole of the upper class in the designation "Barbarians". Such sweeping generalizations cannot be taken at their face value. The Victorians—and nobody regretted it more than Arnold himself—were a race of stiff-necked individualists, not to be drilled into conformity with any rule. The "Barbarians" included a scientist as great as Rayleigh, a poet as musical as Swinburne. There were Lord Brownlow, the friend of the pre-Raphaelites, Lord Mount Temple, a pioneer of educational reform, and Lord Salisbury who, though capable of crowning the brow of Alfred Austin with laurels fallen from that of Alfred Tennyson, was, as Randolph Churchill put it, "never happy out of his damned laboratory".

All of which goes to prove that it was possible, even in the early years of Victoria's widowhood, to be a man of breeding without being a barbarian. But it would seem to have been no more than barely possible. Nobody could have been less like the average peer than the Cavendish Professor of Experimental Physics, while it would be as absurd to draw conclusions from an ancient Northumbrian family having thrown up a Swinburne as it would be to identify the upper with the criminal

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class from the fact of some noble lord having done time.

Disregarding a few exceptional persons, hardly numerous enough to fill the inside of an omnibus, all the evidence goes to show that Matthew Arnold's epithet, "Barbarians", was as fully justified as any such epithet can be, by the complacently unintellectual tone of genteel society at the beginning of the seventies. The fastidious culture of the eighteenth-century intelligentsia, and even the Corinthian elegance of the Regency, had vanished leaving no trace behind. Since the great break with French culture at the Revolution, England had become insular in a sense that would never have held good before, and brains had consequently run to muscle. To the English gentleman, as to the Indian brave, there was no higher bliss imaginable than that of a happy hunting ground. No doubt he had a vague belief that he would some day have the pleasure of sitting for ever, in something like his nightshirt, on a golden form, with a harp between his knees and an *Ancient and Modern* on his lap, and that grace would be given him to enjoy this sort of thing when it came to the point. But that was not precisely his idea of enjoyment above ground.

How many Victorian magnates have faded out of history, because the scene of their triumphs was on the turf, or in the hunting-field, and further their ambitions did not extend! Disinter, if you can, the record of any noble or ducal family, and it is ten to one that you will find its leading representative to have been a famous master of hounds or owner of race-horses, or perhaps even a slaughterer of big game.

"Jerusalem!" exclaims one of the noblemen in Disraeli's *Lothair*, "what on earth could they go to Jerusalem for? There is no sort of sport there. They say, in the Upper Nile, there is good shooting."

We have been taught by Ralph Nevill to think of the Victorians as "gay", and no doubt the gentleman of the sixties, away from the society of his women-folk, could have given points to the brightest young person of our own time in rowdiness and dissipation. But his notions of gaiety, even by Nevill's account, displayed little wit and less imagination. Alcoholic stimulus, concubinage with paid women, billiards in public rooms dim with the smoke of cigars, perhaps a little street rowdiness late at night, and above all gambling, a form of speculation that provided many a rich young man with the only practicable means of reducing himself to poverty—these were what constituted gaiety. One cannot help wondering, sometimes, how the Gay Victorians could have stood the monotony of their own bliss.

The Marquis of Hastings, for instance, that fast young man who dropped £140,000 over a single race, who is said to have once driven to Ascot on a hearse—an act of whose symbolic appropriateness he was probably unconscious—and who died ruined in body and estate at the age of twenty-six, might qualify for the title "the gayest of the gay". So, for that matter, might a Bedlamite, smashing the furniture of his cell in an ecstasy of maniacal exaltation.

There are degrees in gaiety, and even vice loses half its evil by losing all its grossness. What delicate fragrance invests the memory of the Pompadour! The Corinthian ladies of the Tom and Jerry days seem to have exerted themselves, like the Athenian *hetairæ*, to acquire at least the veneer of culture, in order to qualify themselves for something more than a merely physical communion with their patrons. But in Victorian times pleasure, though it had not ceased to be pursued, had ceased to be respectable. The wrath of the Lord clouded even its innocent forms. To a pious nose, some odour of brimstone could be detected even in the fragrance of a cigar,

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and it must have been felt, if not expressed, that the proceedings at Cana of Galilee had been—to say the least of it—unfortunate. This killjoy mentality, once peculiar to the bourgeoisie, had spread gradually upwards, and now, as for the greatest houses in the land, they served the Lord. A gentleman, accordingly, imparted some decent grossness to his pleasures. It was not necessary to aggravate sin by making an art of it.

The *betaira* of this time were accordingly lost women, unmentionable in decent society and known to their clients by the contemptuous designation of Polls. It is not unnatural that poor Poll should usually have played up to the part assigned to her, and adopted a self-defensive brazenness of demeanour. The famous Anonyma, or Skittles, who, driving her own elegant victoria, was almost as well known a figure in the Park as the Iron Duke had been in his day, was a foul-mouthed and drunken termagant without a vestige of self-respect. This is a far cry from Corinthian Kate, from Perdita and Lady Hamilton.

There is little enough to sentimentalize over in this Dundreary gaiety. It was, at best, the animal exuberance of barbarians, and barbarians furtively conscious of violating their own taboos. It was equally divorced from intellect and the graces. They did these things better, because more openly, at the court of Napoleon III. It was better to gaze on the Countess Castiglione's lovely body than to listen to the damns and bloodys of Anonyma. It is not without its significance that the fourth Marquis of Hertford, the connoisseur who purchased the magnificent Wallace collection, should have elected, like his brother Lord Henry Seymour, to pass practically the whole of an Epicurean existence in the congenial atmosphere of Paris.

To be a gay Victorian was, of course, a male

prerogative. To call a woman gay would have been the most unforgivable of insults. There was another life than that of clubs and houses of call, a life over which woman was politely supposed to reign, and of whose refinements she was the guardian. And no doubt the grossness of the smoking-room was successfully banished from the drawing-room. But the Victorian lady had seldom the inclination, or even the will, to go beyond negative refinement to positive culture. There was hardly anything in London Society corresponding to the French *salon*. Every Victorian lady had her accomplishments, but an ability to paint recognizable water-colours was not inconsistent with an abysmal ignorance of art, and a turn for poker work and fancy wood carving by no means implied a *flair* for interior decoration. Since piety had become fashionable, it was thought more important to serve the Lord than to sacrifice to the graces—and the Lord was known to be a jealous god. Parnassus was covered with His notice boards. Nudity was not found pure in His sight, nor passion proper. It was wonderful that under these circumstances the mid-Victorian lady accomplished as much as she did; that dinner parties were sometimes, at least, enlivened by witty conversation, and that men of genius, like Disraeli, were enabled to find solace, if not inspiration, in female companionship.

It was unfortunate that the Royal Family should have been so utterly cut off, as it was after the death of the Prince Consort, from the intellectual and æsthetic life of the time. Victoria, despite the tartan horrors of her Balmoral, was by no means a Philistine, though it was the most obvious and orthodox forms of art that met with her approval, and her eldest daughter, her father's favourite, who was shipped off in her 'teens to Germany, was a highly accomplished woman. Another daughter actually contrived a

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statue not inferior in merit to some others of that time. But the Prince of Wales, who might have become a leader of culture as well as fashion, was almost totally devoid of literary and æsthetic sympathies, except in so far as he was capable of being amused by light opera. The doors of Marlborough House, open to financiers, to witty conversationalists, to the leaders of the racing world, and men distinguished in many walks of life, were closed against artists and men of letters.¹ Pigeon shooting was more to His Royal Highness's taste than poetry, and a figure lost much of its attraction for him when transferred to canvas. It was perhaps a subconscious reaction against his father's influence that led to his own being thrown on to the side of the Barbarians.

After all, it is as easy to make bricks without straw, as to create an enlightened upper class without education. And as far as the training of the intellect is concerned, it would hardly be too much to say that the average boy, at one of the more expensive and select public schools, not only lacked any such training, but was drilled into a positive aversion from any sort of intellectual activity. The curriculum was so remote from all the needs and realities of life, that it was rightly regarded by the boy as an irksome and unnecessary grind, to be got through, or preferably shirked, with least possible expenditure of energy. It was, in fact, several centuries out of date, adapted, as it was, to the requirements of the Renaissance, when Greek and Latin formed between them a universal language and when almost everything that was of value either in science or literature had to be studied in one or other of them. At that time the cult of the classics had aroused a high and almost holy enthusiasm; they formed the key to a new realm of light and intellectual beauty; to write

¹ As such—for an exception must be made of Monckton Milnes.

pure Ciceronian instead of the old rough-and-ready monk Latin was the crown of many a famous scholar's ambitions.

At such a school as Eton, the form of this classical training remained, but the soul had long departed from it. Even the masters had ceased to have much heart in the routine, though, as it provided them with a dignified and not too strenuous means of livelihood, they were as a rule ready to fight in the last ditch against any sort of change. To the boy it was a matter of hunting in dictionaries, of derivations, of arbitrary but confusing quantities, of words to be jammed into so-called verses whose connection with poetry he hardly suspected, and so many lines "construe" carved from some book or alleged drama, in which, as book or drama, no one expected him to take the least interest. A bright boy might sharpen his wits and evade the dictionary by the practice of cribbing, but as such activities were supposed to be criminal, they were not pursued in any spirit of disinterested scholarship. And to confirm, if that were necessary, the pupil's hatred for the whole company of the quantitative and grammatical, from Homer to Lucian, the prescribed form of non-corporal punishment consisted in scribbling uncomprehended extracts from their works, measured by fifties or hundreds of lines, on to the paper, to the ruin of handwriting—since no honourable master, having received honest quantity, would raise finicking objections on the score of quality.

It was to this Bedlamite travesty of education that the young squire or peer was subjected during the most formative years of his life. If he had acquired such a culture as an understanding acquaintance with the classics is capable of conferring, that would have been much to the good. In the eighteenth century something of the sort does not infrequently seem to have been achieved—Charles James Fox was as fond

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of his Euripides as of his game of cards at Brookes's. But throughout the nineteenth century the familiarity of gentlemen with the classics becomes more and more exceptional; Gladstone and Lord Derby—Disraeli's colleague and the translator of Homer—being among the last representatives of the old tradition, and the survivors from the time when enormous daily portions of verse had to be learnt by heart under pain of stripes, a heroic method that does seem to have been crowned with results. But the days were past when a gentleman would have been as much ashamed to misplace his quantities as to drop his aitches. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a priggish familiarity with such matters would have been decently cloaked even if it had existed.

A modern, as distinct from a classical education, was beginning to be offered at some progressive schools, but those with the proudest traditions were generally bulwarks of reaction. At Eton, when, as a great concession, French was first allowed to be taught, it was on the extraordinary condition that it should be treated on the footing of a dead language.

The second quarter of the century was an age of reforming head masters, and much of anarchic brutality was purged away. The principle was adopted, in many schools, of deputing authority to the elder boys; the result of this was to create a sort of dual government, a monitorial oligarchy under the suzerainty of the masters. This suzerainty could seldom be very close or effective owing to the juvenile species of trade-unionism which rendered a boy ready to undergo or tolerate any wrong, rather than violate the taboo upon "sneaking".

The task of training up men of light and leading was in fact twofold. Light should have been generated by a school curriculum, which more often had the effect of extinguishing any wakening sparks

of intellect. Leading was provided for by the real public school education, which emanated from the other boys. It was a Spartan discipline, crushing out individuality, but developing powers of command and self-command to an extent unequalled in any other system of education. It was a discipline, largely, of athletics, including that characteristically Spartan form of athleticism that consists in the endurance of pain. The taboo on sneaking, combined with the mass suggestion of loyalty to the school, enabled the darker aspects of this rule of boys by boys to be successfully concealed. What physical and moral outrage a child might be subjected to by his seniors in the process of hardening, was happily unsuspected by parents. A fellow did not talk about such things on holidays, still less write about them during term time. The barbarian chief, or atheling, may be a magnificent specimen of humanity, fearless, strong, fit to command. But in an age when science and machinery are revolutionizing civilization, qualities of mind and spirit are required beyond the scope of the noblest savage. These qualities were tragically lacking in the class to which a naturally conservative people was accustomed, and on the whole willing, to look for guidance.

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CHAPTER VI

PHILISTIA IN DECLINE

The achievement of those four wonderful decades, from 1830 to 1870, is not, to any considerable extent, that of the landed aristocracy. England was, to an extent unparalleled before or since, dominated by her bourgeoisie, and what we generally mean by the Victorian Age is, for good or evil, their age. In their uniform of sombre black they conquered new realms of science and literature; they made England the workshop of the world; they laid deep and truly though without intending it, the foundations of a Commonwealth of Nations.

Matthew Arnold had his epithet for them too. They were Philistines, enemies of the light. That seems strange, in view of the harvest of genius of which the soil of Victorian Philistia was prolific. And yet there was something even in that genius that savours a little of Gath. There was hardly one, even of the greatest Victorians of this epoch, who could not be made to contribute pretty handsomely to a Philistine anthology: Carlyle on Keats—"fricassee of dead dog"; Macaulay as bull in the Nankeen China shop; Herbert Spencer on almost every work of literary or artistic genius he had ever heard of; Dickens bargeing into criticism of Pre-Raphaelite art; Ruskin on Canaletto and Ruysdael and Whistler; Tennyson consoling his hero for the loss of Maud by shipping him frothing and bawling to the Crimea; and last, but not least, Matthew himself, disposing of Shelley's life in an essay and his poetry in a sentence—what Philistines!

Looking into it a little more closely, we begin to suspect that the Philistinism is not a mere blemish on the genius, but, in a sense, part of it. Take away the Philistine element, and you take that rude and abounding energy that is the secret of Victorian achievement. The brood of Goliath does not advance, like Agag, delicately—it strides forward, with spear as thick as a weaver's beam, smashing down indiscriminately everything in front of it. Not an elegant method of fighting, but still—judged by results—uncommonly effective.

When Arnold said "Philistine", what he usually had at the back of his mind was "Puritan", and the Middle Class of the first half of the reign was Puritan and Evangelical to the backbone, not even excepting those of its members who, like Herbert Spencer, had carried Protestantism to its logical conclusion of repudiating every sort of supernatural authority. Middle-class Puritanism was no doubt a hard and unlovely creed, actively hostile to beauty, but it was also a discipline in that sovereign faculty of concentration, failing which no work of enduring beauty ever left its creator's hands.

Nowadays one has a little hesitation in using the term middle-class. It is apt to cause a slight embarrassment, as if you had insinuated that some one was a second-class lady or gentleman. As on the railways, there is now only first and third. One of the great difficulties of organizing the middle class is that nobody is very keen on advertising that he belongs to it. It was quite different in the first half of Victoria's reign. Then the bourgeoisie was proudly—even aggressively—class-conscious. Such men as Cobden and Bright regarded their class as the backbone of the country, and themselves as inheriting the tradition of the great merchant princes, the Fuggers and Welsers. What irritated Arnold about his Philistines was their maddening self-

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complacency. They were not ashamed of being middle class; they were ready to tell the world about it. Like Mr. Brownlow and Mr. Pickwick, they were respectable British citizens, and what Duke could flaunt a prouder title?

Now it was just about this time, 1870, that the first signs of change were beginning to be apparent. Five years before, a note of prophetic warning had been sounded. Charles Dickens had opened the last of his completed novels with a description of the newly rich Veneering household. This was something entirely new in Dickens. It was not that the Veneerings were odious, in the sense that Pecksniff had been odious, or Gradgrind, or the unconverted Scrooge. Even in his book, *Our Mutual Friend*, he does not put them in the pillory as he does Mr. Podsnap. He observes them and senses their atmosphere as a startling and rather unpleasant phenomenon. His novels had been one great human comedy of middle-class life in the days of its glory. But when the curtain rises upon the Veneerings, we are watching the prologue to a tragedy. Matthew Arnold, who disliked the bourgeoisie, saw it only in the plenitude of its Philistine strength. Dickens, whose insight was born of love, published in the streets of Askelon the first premonitory news of its decline.

“Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were brand-new people in a brand-new house in a brand-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new.”

There had been just such a new establishment in the forties, when Hudson, the railway king, had risen on the crest of a boom whose slump was

destined to engulf him, and most of his shareholders, in ruin. But Hudson was an isolated phenomenon, and Society only knew him by stories of his own and his wife's extravagances. It was otherwise with the Veneerings, who were not only tolerated, but actually courted by needy aristocrats like Lady Tippins, and genteel men about town like Mr. Twemlow.

Though described in a mood of rollicking humour, the Veneerings' dinner-party leaves a more unpleasant impression than almost anything else in Dickens. The gallery of Dickens portraits contained some ugly enough characters, but even Ralph Nickleby and Scrooge had stood four-square to the world with a certain self-respect. They may have wanted money, to enjoy or to hoard, but they did not dream of using it to buy themselves out of their class. Being respectable why should they aspire to be genteel? But this kind of self-respect was just what the Veneerings lacked. They were not only a new, but a sham product, perpetually trying to pass themselves off for something other than they were. But their lack of self-respect was no greater than that of their aristocratic friends, fawning, literally, for food—Lady Tippins's gastronomic exploits are mercilessly set down—upon those they despised.

But in 1865 such pushers as the Veneerings had hardly begun to make any impression, except on the alert intelligence of Dickens. Matthew Arnold's representative Philistine was Mr. Bottles, a self-important and thoroughly self-satisfied bourgeois. But even by the beginning of the seventies, that satisfaction was beginning to wear a little thin. The star of the Philistine was on the wane. Instead of thanking God that he was born in Gath, he began to dream wild dreams of being numbered with the Barbarians.

Several causes were contributing to undermine the old order of middle-class society. The indi-

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vidualist employer, ruthlessly pushing his own business in the face of cut-throat competition, was now beginning to yield place to the salaried directorate of a Limited Liability Company. There was not the same pride to be derived from such service as from even the pettiest autocracy.

The very success of British business had its effect on the business man. There was no longer the same desperate struggle for survival as there had been earlier in the century. Those lean and tight-lipped factory owners, with the prospect of the debtors' jail never very remote, had been succeeded by a new type of *entrepreneur*, sleek and a little pompous, with billowing frock-coat and gold Albert watch-chain, the very picture of gilt-edged security. In fact, he was rather too much inclined to take that security for granted, and to allow foreigners to cut in and exploit new processes and methods that had their origin in British brains.

This worthy personage was a good, as well as a prolific father, and was rightly determined that his boys should have the best education that his now well-lined purse could buy—the education, in fact, of a gentleman. Such education as he himself had got, had been picked up in a casual and haphazard sort of way. Speaking offhand, one can remember none of Dickens's vast company of worthy middle-class characters who is known to have hailed from a public school—though Sir Leicester Dedlock must surely have been an Etonian. Dickens himself received his education in the hard school of life. Of the great men of genius who were his contemporaries, it is remarkable how few went through the discipline of a formal school education. Tennyson and Browning were brought home from local schools at the ages of eleven and fourteen respectively; Mill was his father's pupil; Herbert Spencer is described as having been practically self-taught; the best part

of Ruskin's education was that which he picked up travelling with his parents—he had only a brief and unprofitable experience of a day school.

A middle-class education must have been a rough and ready affair, at best, during the first half of the nineteenth century. Schooling was provided by local day or grammar schools, and by such private establishments as that of Mr. Creakle, in *David Copperfield*. Numbers of boys of quite well-off parents were consigned to private schools where they were kept till they were ready to be launched on the world. Many of these schools were scandalously inefficient—one knows of delicate boys who were literally done to death by neglect and privation. On the other hand, it was possible that chance might throw up a head master of real genius—such a one as Johns of Chipperfield, a reverend botanist who managed to inspire his boys with some of his own enthusiasm for the first-hand study of nature. And again many boys were pitchforked, early in their 'teens, into the business of making a living.

But by the middle of the century, the extension and strengthening of the public-school system were beginning to effect a silent revolution in the character of the bourgeoisie. Not only the increased abundance of money, but the development of railways, made it easy to send boys backwards and forwards three times a year to distant establishments where they could be herded together and standardized according to the most approved patterns. New public schools sprang up in response to the growing demand; the old grammar schools were brought up to date; even in the oldest foundations some form of the new monitorial system was introduced. A standardized type of education, in and out of school hours, turned out a standardized type of boy, well-mannered, self-reliant and athletic, not easily to be distinguished from the Etonian or Wykehamist product.

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It is one of Mr. Chesterton's paradoxes that the glory of Dickens consisted in his having been unable to describe a gentleman. Sir Leicester Dedlock is proof to the contrary, and so even is Twemlow. But one feels that Dickens was never quite at home in upper-class society, and—what is more—that he would have thought no shame to have joined in the Radical chorus :

I am no gentleman, not I,
No! no! no! no!

The gentleman, by the very fact of his conforming to a high standard, must to that extent be standardized. And we may perhaps amend Mr. Chesterton's dictum, by saying that it is the glory, not only of Dickens, but of that grand, early Victorian bourgeoisie of which he was the representative man, that they were too individual to be standardized, even as gentlemen. This may have been responsible for a certain lack of intellectual discipline, even in the best of them, but the soil that nourished the weeds also gave birth to an exuberant harvest of genius.

Now that the Philistine could afford to have his son drilled into the likeness of a Barbarian, it remained to be seen whether that prolific exuberance could survive the process, or whether the advantage of being like-mannered with any average Duke would entail the penalty of being also like-minded. And again, would it be possible to maintain upper-class exclusiveness, not against figures of fun like poor old Hudson, but against a new class of parvenu whose manners gave no clue to his origin?

CHAPTER VII
THE EDUCATION OF THE
PROLETARIAT

Brief and brilliant had been the reign of the bourgeoisie, but after 1867 it was something more than probable that, sooner or later, power would go with the vote, and that what Matthew Arnold called the populace would be in a position to determine the nation's destinies.

Except for a few disgruntled die-hards, like Robert Lowe, such a prospect—if ever envisaged at all—had no terrors. There had seldom been a time when the wage-earning class had been less in the limelight than during the fifties and sixties. In the mines, in the factories, in the fields, the workers were devoting the best of their bodily and mental powers to building up the prosperity that was the theme of so many middle-class panegyrics. They were giving of their energy too freely to have much of it available for other employment. Men of creative genius did not rise from among their ranks. But they were, on the whole, contented with the steady improvement of their conditions. Times, if hard, were not so hard as they had been, and were getting better.

It was a period of incubation. In the first wild rush from handicraft to machinery, conditions in the new factory towns had been chaotic. The advantages of mass production were sensationally obvious, but the effects of herding together enormous masses of humanity to serve the machines, and the new social problems thereby created, were hardly appreciated at all. Everything except output was left to chance.

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The new towns thoroughly deserved the name of wens. They were hideous, squalid and dreary, their inhabitants, during their brief intervals of exhausted respite from the machines, knew none of the beauties of nature, and few of the amenities of life. Even Sunday was made a day of Lord-fearing gloom by a devout magistracy. It is little wonder that uncouth manners and brutal amusements were rife.

There is, for example, Leech's cartoon of the new clergyman, expressing the hope, to a group of friendly miners, that he may see them on the following Sunday, and receiving the reply :

"Oh, aye, 'e may coom if 'e loike. We fight in the croft, and old Joe Tanner brings the beer."

The wonder is that, in their cheerless environment, the workers did not sink into hopeless savagery. It is however the fact that, in spite of all disadvantages, they clung fast to their heritage of civilization, and not only materially, but morally and intellectually, contributed to progress. Quite early in the Industrial Revolution, it became evident that the constant association with machinery had its distinctive effect on human beings, just as that with horses results in the horsiness of ostlers, grooms, hunt-servants and jockeys. The more skilled the work, the more pronounced its effect. An aristocracy of labour began to emerge. The engineers were early marked apart by their hunger for exact and technical knowledge. Mechanics' Institutes date from the twenties. The factory worker, particularly in the North, was evolving a shrewder, better-educated, though perhaps more dour and ruthless type than his country cousin.

The mere fact that vast multitudes of workers found themselves pitchforked into these new towns, and compelled to shift for themselves under conditions of ruthless competition, had the effect of training them in habits of individual and collective self-help. They were completely severed from the old, semi-feudal

traditions. They never came into contact with a squire, and their relations with their employer had little in them of sentiment. If they respected him at all, it was on account of his greater capacity than themselves for accumulating "brass".

It was early borne in upon them that, as individuals, they were at a hopeless disadvantage in dealing with their bosses and had little chance of support from the genteel politicians at Westminster, who lived in a world apart from them and their needs. So they began to organize in Trades Unions, in Chartist lodges, in co-operatives. They had much to learn, and their failures were for long years more conspicuous than their successes. Strike after strike ended in defeat; Robert Owen's scheme for a universal Trades Union proved unworkable; Chartism declined from the formidable to the ridiculous after the fiasco of the monster petition of 1848. In the fifties and sixties, the ambitions of the workers were limited to the practicable—one might say to the commonplace. Trades Union history records no grandiose combinations, only the patient spadework of individual and local unions. But it was just by this means that the workers were training themselves in the routine and discipline of combination. A man's union was not only a war-time organization for carrying through some life and death struggle for wages, but a perpetual bond between him and his mates. Such another bond was furnished by the co-operative societies, which, from a humble beginning in Toad Lane, at Rochdale, were now becoming the recognized means of enabling the working class consumer to become, collectively, the provider of his own necessities.

All this was developing a team spirit among the town workers, which in due time might ripen into a militant class consciousness. But in the country, where the feudal tradition still persisted, the labourer

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was less inclined to take matters into his own hands. Trades unionism, when, in the early seventies, there was an attempt to extend it to agriculture, broke down altogether against the active hostility of the "quality", and the apathy and suspiciousness of the labourers themselves. The habit of looking outside their own class for leadership and support was too deeply ingrained. Gradually there appeared a vertical as well as a horizontal cleavage in the social order. The ever-increasing multitude of those who tended the machines became opposed in ideas and ideals to those who tilled the soil.

Class consciousness, as we understand it to-day, was only in embryo, even in the towns. Karl Marx had not yet become a name to conjure with among the workers, and there was less revolutionary feeling now than there had been during the sixty years between the outbreak of the French Revolution and the collapse of Chartism. That the working class had not only the capacity for feeling in unison, but something to which it would be churlish to deny the name of a soul, was shown at the time of the American Civil War, when the Northern blockade of the cotton ports, by cutting off Lancashire from its raw material, plunged its artisans into terrible misery. But not for a moment did they allow their own interests to bias them in favour of slave-owners. With true Lancashire doggedness, they and their lasses went on short commons, and prayed for the triumph of Lincoln and his armies.

It was no wonder that the great body of the well-to-do should have accepted with misgiving the partnership of the working class in the franchise. But it was plainly inexpedient that a large, or any, proportion of this new governing class should remain uneducated. In the nineteenth century it had become almost inconceivable that any knowledge worth having could be communicated except by means of the

printed word, and hence it had come to be pretty generally assumed that education and literacy were the same thing. It is true that Charlemagne and Akbar had been illiterates, equally true that a mere bowing acquaintance with the three R's is in itself no education at all, but merely a means of opening the mind to all manner of information, true or false, and exposing it naked to suggestion, good, bad, or indifferent.

It was just this sort of literacy that was conferred by Mr. Forster's great Education Act of 1870, the most important achievement of Gladstone's first ministry, but one in which Gladstone himself displayed surprisingly little interest. By this Act, schools were provided for all, though the power of making attendance compulsory was at first left with the local Boards, and payment was exacted from the parents and enforced at some schools by the brutal method of thrashing children who came unprovided with school pence. Compulsory education, free of charge, was finally established in 1891.

But for the training of the mind and character, the only education worthy the name, the new scheme hardly attempted to provide. If the excellent Mr. Forster, connection of the Arnolds though he was, had used the words of Pericles—"we aim at beauty without extravagance and contemplation without unmanliness"¹ he would have seemed to anyone familiar with the working of the new national schools as one that mocked. The only training of the character that anyone deemed practicable was that imparted by the various churches and sects. These bodies, and particularly the Church of England, had been beforehand with the State in the educational field, and it was one of the most difficult of all questions on what terms the already existing schools should be adopted into the general scheme.

¹ Sir R. Pollock's Translation.

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It was the deliberate aim of Liberalism to be educationally neutral. Any official attempt to bias the character or to impart any definite philosophy of life was felt to be an infringement of liberty. It was a grievance that any citizen should be compelled to pay a single penny in rates (though the same principle was not held to apply to taxes) towards the teaching of any dogma—even to other people's children—of which he might not approve. English common sense, or muddle-headedness, arrived at an extraordinary compromise, whereby, in the new, State-provided Board Schools, the Hebrew Scriptures were allowed to be taught, provided they were not explained with sufficient clarity to allow the explanation to coincide with anybody's doctrine.

But such smattering of Christianity as could be imparted, even where and when the sectarians had a free hand, did not amount to much more than scratching the surface of the mind. It was one thing to stumble or gabble through parts of the Catechism, or even, if you were exceptionally bright, to be able to answer, in Sunday School, how many bears ate how many children and what lessons this ought to teach us, but it was quite another to turn out men and women capable of so ruling and ordering a machine-fed civilization as to make its gifts a blessing instead of a means of suicide.

It might have been argued that the average public schoolboy did not get so very much more out of his undigested Latin and Greek than the National school child out of his painful climb from first towards sixth standard. But the public schoolboy did get his character educated, after a fashion, out of school hours. There was nothing corresponding to this juvenile discipline available for the young proletarian, when he issued from the classroom into the street which was most often his playground. He was barely literate—and not invariably that. One has

come across men in the war-time army, who, despite full years of schooling, could not stumble through their A B C, nor even spell their own names correctly.

Literacy is no doubt the first thing needful in a modern education, but a just literate crowd is a pipe on whose stops any cunning and interested practitioner is able to play what tunes he will. The task of moulding the mind, from which the State conscientiously turns aside, will be joyfully shouldered by the political boss and the cheap newspaper proprietor.

CHAPTER VIII
THE CRUMBLING OF THE
CERTAINTIES

If we had to select a point of time by which we could date the passing of the great Victorian Age, it would be that in which Dickens dropped in a mortal swoon from his place at the dinner-table, on the 6th of June, 1870. It is a pity that some other word cannot be invented to cover the last three decades of the Queen's immensely long reign. When the ordinary man talks of the Victorian Age, what he usually has in mind is the period of bourgeois supremacy, which would be better dated from the accession of Victoria's sailor uncle than that of Victoria herself. By 1870, the stately edifice of Victorian achievement stood practically complete, and if every work of creative genius subsequent to that time were to be blotted out of memory, our estimate of the most eminent Victorians would be substantially what it is to-day.

It was not that any startling break with the old tradition was to be witnessed in 1870 or the decade that succeeded it. On the contrary, things seemed to go on complacently in the old grooves. Tennyson and Browning, Darwin, Huxley and Spencer, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, Morris and Swinburne, Millais and Rossetti, continued to dominate the scene, and showed no abatement in vigour. The lack of new men worthy to rank with these giants was conspicuous. So far from the Victorian glory being past, it might have seemed as if Victorianism had stabilized itself for a quite indefinite period. But in things of

the spirit, stability is death. There is a beauty of those still, cloudless days that sometimes usher in November, when the woods are yet in leaf and glorious with tawny and gold, but the leaves are dead and hang by their brittle and sapless stalks waiting for the first onrush of storm from the south-west.

Nothing, indeed, is more wonderful about the greater Victorians than their longevity, not only in years but in working vigour. Unlike the romantic contemporaries of Keats, or the æsthetic revivalists of the nineties, their genius climbed slowly to its zenith, and for a long time its decline was hardly perceptible. There was the Laureate, Tennyson, now a bearded and majestic bard of sixty, and occupying a position in the public eye such as had been attained by no previous English poet during his own lifetime. In verse as flawless as ever, he was bringing to completion his most ambitious venture, that of reviving Britain's legendary past as Virgil had revived that of Rome. He was about to launch out into drama, of a kind more literary than dramatic; one or two of his greatest short, narrative poems were yet to come. But except, perhaps, for *Rizpah* and *Crossing the Bar*, we should have a reasonably complete Tennyson, had the Laureate died on the same day as Dickens. Perhaps his reputation would even stand higher, if some of the merely flawless work of his later years—and some work not flawless at all, but flat and bathetic, like the lamentable Jubilee Ode—had been denied us.

There was Browning, with his master work of *The Ring and the Book* accomplished, continuing his experiments in psychological dissection with a subtle ingenuity that, as time went on and the difficulties of interpretation increased, became more and more a matter of blind faith to the ordinary reader. There was Swinburne, whom the least stimulus would incite to endless variations on the musical themes of *Atalanta*

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and *Poems and Ballads*, sound which, like that of running water, exercised a hypnotic effect, so that one could be held spellbound without ever asking what—if anything—the words might mean. There was George Eliot, no longer content with the direct and intuitive vision of her early novels, but interminably set on conquering, by scientific rule and line, the mysteries of the soul. There was Matthew Arnold, forsaking the chair for the pulpit, a mournful evangelist who had somehow contrived to mislay his gospel. There was Ruskin, now entering on his career as a professor, a capricious and eloquent oracle, more and more recklessly dogmatic as his mind hardened with oncoming old age.

These Victorian giants gained in impressiveness with every passing year. Their output continued undiminished. But they had almost ceased to create. As compared with previous decades, the seventies—in literature at any rate—were to be a time of rather unfruitful transition. It was as if the great figures, like old beech-trees, would not let any alien growth spring up in their shadow.

Whatever doubts we, of the present day, may harbour about the great Victorians and their pretensions, they were at least magnificently free from anything of the sort about themselves. That is what lends such zest to the sport of baiting their memories. They stare back at us, from their frames and pedestals, with an expression of such serene—not to say smug—self-assurance, that iconoclasm becomes the only relief for the feelings of the ordinary modern. Tariff reformers have found the whiskers and immaculate appearance of Bright and Cobden a godsend for the purpose of working up an emotional reaction against free imports. The game of Victorian Aunt Sally, first discovered—but unhappily not patented—by Lytton Strachey, has turned out to be one of the most profitable on record. There are few of us who have not

a sneaking sympathy with the unjust Athenian who voted for the ostracism of Aristides, because he was sick of hearing him called the Just.

We, by whom the certainties of our great-grandparents are no longer regarded with becoming seriousness, are able to detect one very significant characteristic of Victorian cocksureness. Certainty was attained by a tacit convention that no one was to blackleg by making too close an examination of the things he was certain about.

To illustrate my meaning, may I be allowed to cite a very early experience of my own?

I had been taught about God by a dear old Victorian clergyman, who explained to me just why God must be. It was extremely simple. The world was so wonderful, that somebody even more wonderful must have made it. Hence God.

I could detect no flaw in this reasoning, but a certain apparent incompleteness. With a faith I never afterwards recovered in the capacity of grown-up people, and particularly reverend grown-ups, to resolve incipient doubt, I proceeded to ask:

“But then, who made God?”

The result was not the explanation I had expected, but an explosion that left me utterly bewildered. I had been brought up in a Christian family. . . . I had been the cause of unutterable grief and disappointment. . . . Satan had quite obviously entered into my heart, not without previous encouragement. . . .

I had, all unwittingly, blundered into what, to every good Victorian, was the unforgivable sin. It was not, as I half suspected myself, that the unknown God-maker was some one not quite respectable. It was simply that I had pried beneath the surface of a belief, that I had not known where to stop short of a logical consequence. It was rather as if a lady who had signed herself “Yours truly” had been embraced on the strength of it by some all too literal swain.

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It had not been so in the ages of real faith. To St. Thomas and the medieval schoolmen, it was not enough to believe in God and leave it at that. They would leave no question unanswered that human ingenuity could devise concerning the divine nature and attributes. They had no fear, at the back of their minds, that any danger to faith could lurk in the process of such definition. But the Victorians were common-sense persons, with a shrewd business instinct. In an age of revolutionary change, it was asking for trouble to expose the foundations of anything one wanted preserved. As Lord Melbourne used to say, "Why can't they leave it alone?"

It is doubtful whether many scientists seriously believed, even during the first half of the nineteenth century, that the results of their research were quite on all fours with the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. But so long as they refrained from drawing inferences that had the effect of giving Moses the lie direct, they might pursue their investigations in peace. One of the most remarkable features of the Darwinian controversy is the virtual inability of Darwin's opponents to offer any coherent alternative to his theory. What they really wanted was not truth, but decency. (The origin of species, for adults, was like the origin of babies, for children—a thing about which nice little people did not ask questions. The doctor with his bag, and Jehovah with His handful of dust, were all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

It was not only in religion that the Victorians were wont to display their characteristic tactfulness in stopping short of undesirable conclusions. Their so-called utilitarianism, which was about the nearest they could get to a philosophy, consisted, originally, in a calculus of happiness—as if happiness was a thing that could be weighed and distributed like sacks of potatoes. Their political economy owed its form to

a judicious mental economy. The Jewish banker Ricardo had formulated a theory of rent, which showed very clearly how certain persons might be in a position to levy a toll on the rest of the community in the shape of unearned increment. But Ricardo, being a banker and not a landowner, had naively limited his class of *rentiers* to the owners of land. What was sauce for the landowning goose was by no means sauce for the capitalist gander—not at least till Karl Marx came along, and pushed the theory of his fellow Jew to its entirely indecent conclusion.

We have seen something of Victorian morality. It reposed upon the belief that if you could not be virtuous, you could at least be respectable. Though the streets of London swarmed with harlots and a male virgin was regarded in the smoking-room as a rather poor-spirited fellow, the pretence of chastity was to be kept up. A conspiracy of decent silence was maintained, under the direst penalties, regarding any possible infringement of sexual taboo. Literature was adapted to the requirements of young ladies who were almost unconscious of possessing legs. Actors were evangelists of monogamy on the stage, whatever they might be off it. Mistresses were regretfully admitted by historians to have emphasized the awfulness of Restoration and Regency times. How different had been the orgies of Carlton House and the Pavilion from the domestic amenities of Balmoral and Sandringham!

But, by 1870, it was becoming all too obvious that the foundations of Victorian respectability were undermined. The pretence that belief could be stabilized was no longer plausible. The attempt to suppress Darwin had only recoiled on its authors, by advertising that inoffensive biologist as a sort of Antichrist. When it began to be realized that evolution had come to stay, the conclusion was naturally drawn that religion, having lost its seven days' Creation and its

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divine origin of species, was seriously discredited. Not very convincing were belated attempts to lighten the good ship of faith by throwing overboard a minimum of untenable beliefs.

Where was this going to stop? You might abandon the literal interpretation of Genesis—as even a Bishop, Colenso of Natal, had found himself constrained in honesty to do—but if the Creation to-day, why not the Resurrection to-morrow? The New Testament, in Germany, had long been assailed with ruthless ferocity, and George Eliot—a woman too—had brought the infection to British shores, by translating Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, as long ago as 1844. So far these tendencies may only have begun to affect a small group of intellectuals, but anxious watchers could see that the tide of infidelity was steadily rising.

This was bad enough, but not the worst. The Darwinians and Higher Critics at least made it a point of honour to prove themselves as unimpeachably respectable as any of their clerical opponents. "Cardinal Huxley and Professor Manning" was considered a very plausible printer's error. But there was a poet, with flaming hair and passions, who was enthralling educated youth with verse, the like of which, for sheer wizardry of lyrical technique, was something new even in English poetry. But Algernon Charles Swinburne, instead of devoting his gifts, like those of Tennyson, to elevating the minds and morals of his readers, luxuriated in a cult of sin of the most refined and Parisian brand, sin, for all practical purposes, being narrowed down to sexual incontinence. Even in his verse, Swinburne was not a very convincing sinner—he was not of the meaty stuff of which the real Don Juans are made. When the celebrated actress, Mencken, a formidable, full-blooded woman, and a bit of a poetess herself, took her fellow bard seriously enough to present herself at his chamber door and demand:

The bitter delights of the dark, the feverish, the furtive
caresses,
That murder the youth in a man, or ever the heart have
its will,

the poet was appalled, and only succeeded in achieving Lust by summoning to his aid her sister, Intemperance.

But that the most popular poet of the younger generation should come out openly on the Devil's side, was proof that the Victorian sexual taboos could be flouted with impunity. A new spirit was abroad, and in 1871 Robert Buchanan was thundering from the pulpit of the *Contemporary Review* against the new, fleshly school of poetry—one of whose exponents was Dante Gabriel Rossetti—and depicting in lurid colours the open impudicity of bookshops and posters that affronted, or delighted, the gaze of those who trod the London pavements.

It was the same in every department of thought and life. Everywhere certainties were being called in question, sanctities were flouted, thought was beginning to slide down the inclined plane towards revolution. The movement might, as yet, be slow, but the acceleration was perceptible.

Victorian political economy was going the way of Victorian religion and Victorian morality. John Stuart Mill, whose writing had constituted the very Bible of capitalist individualism, had, by his own all too candid admission, knocked the bottom out of his own dogma. Henceforth there was no recognized authority in economic matters, and the ordinary man was content to let the professors disagree while he trusted to his own common sense and prejudice. To Socialism, as to paganism and infidelity, the path was open, though there might still be a long way to travel. But that expression of ineffable self-complacency, that unquestioning assurance of living in a safe world, that beams at us from the features of those frock-coated

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and whiskered gentlemen portrayed by the elder Lucas, and even from oleos and faded photographic groups of the fifties and sixties, is getting rare in the seventies. Towards the end of the century we shall look for it in vain.

BOOK II

THE SEVENTIES

CHAPTER I

THE SENSE OF SECURITY

The reading of history renders us liable to misunderstand the perspective in which events appeared to their contemporaries. We unconsciously imagine that the interest of the average man and woman was focussed on the same things as those which are passed fit for the dignity of record. In our own time this is probably nearer to the truth than in that of our grandparents.

We, of the nineteen-thirties, differ from our grandparents in being troubled about many things, at home and abroad, because fear of a by no means remote future has entered into our hearts. But the English of the eighteen-seventies were in the happy position of taking their security so much for granted that they could afford to forget the weightier issues of statesmanship,

What the Swede intends and what the French, and devote themselves rather to the embellishment of civilization than to the strengthening of its foundations.

They had their grievances. There was an income tax of fourpence in the pound, "the impost", as Mr. Punch pathetically called it, "from which you must never expect to be free"—and he even went so far as to hint that the middle class might follow

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the example of the lower, and demonstrate against it in the Park. But in 1873, Mr. Lowe succeeded in reducing the tax to threepence, and Mr. Gladstone, at the dissolution next year, dangled before the electorate the prospect of abolishing it altogether.

There was also that perennial grievance of housewives, since the days when it was first voiced by Defoe, that the domestic servants of their time exceeded those of any previous time in arrogance, laziness and incompetence, the favourite target of criticism being the lordly and pampered men-servants, who were still to be found, in considerable numbers and resplendent liveries, in upper-class households. The problem of the drunken servant was acute to an extent almost forgotten nowadays.

It would be wrong to take such grumbles too seriously. They are only significant as being among the most substantial the time could produce.

It was a very complacent time, and England was much occupied with her own, often trivial affairs. The year 1871 saw the consummation of the German triumph over France, and the brief but shocking episode of the Paris Commune, but it is doubtful whether either of these was so much in the public eye as the famous Tichborne case, one of the crudest and most sensational attempts ever made to sound the abyss of human gullibility. A certain Arthur Orton, a hulking illiterate of low birth and dubious record, had had the bright idea, when in Australia, of claiming to be Sir Roger Tichborne, who had disappeared, together with the ship in which he had been sailing, in the year of the Alma. The fact that the real Sir Roger's mother, whose mind was beginning to fail, was pathetically determined—even before the claimant's appearance—to believe her son restored to her, may have had some influence in inducing other old acquaintances of Sir Roger's to take leave of whatever critical faculties they may

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have possessed, and believe his slim figure to have swelled out into the enormous proportions of Orton. The game was up when the claimant's pretensions were at last tested in court. In a trial of over a hundred days, his shrewdness and effrontery were pitted in vain against the long-drawn but masterly cross-examination of Sir John Coleridge. At last the unhappy jury, who had been dragged for over three months from their normal avocations, could stand it no longer, and declared that they had no need of further witness, whereupon the claimant was nonsuited and promptly arrested on a charge of perjury.

After another trial of prodigious length he was sent to do a stretch of fourteen years, but not even so was the popular sympathy for his cause quenched. His counsel, a certain Dr. Kenealy, who had not only grossly mismanaged the case but got himself disbarred, was elected, on the strength of his own and his client's grievances, to Parliament, where he could not even get two members to introduce him—that ceremony having to be formally dispensed with for his benefit. Orton's adventure had cost the Tichborne estate upwards of £90,000, and the country considerably more.

But at least the claimant had provided some much-needed excitement. There is this disadvantage in times of peace and safety—that these very blessings are generators of a certain boredom. The craving for excitement is deep-rooted in human nature. It is the existence of this craving that accounts for the vogue of that incredible novelist calling herself Ouida. This lady could transport her readers into a world of aristocratic and fabulously wealthy supermen, a world that had no more connection with reality than that of a dream. Her splendid guardsmen would ride their own chargers to victory in the Grand National, or drop nonchalantly into an eight-oared boat, at a moment's notice, and stroke the crew

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to victory in some great race. One of them, pursued in the moonlight by the police and inhabitants of a German town, finds his path blocked by a cart and a couple of mules, and, relaxing for a moment his habitual languor, "rose lightly in the air . . . and with a single running leap, cleared the width of the mules' backs, and landing safely on the farther side, dashed on, scarcely pausing for breath". That particular passage is of the late sixties, but it was during the seventies that Ouida was at the zenith of her reputation.

More important people than Ouida were alive to the advantages that might accrue from exploiting this desire for more colour and excitement than everyday life seemed capable of affording. Among them was that shrewdest of statesmen—the "player", so it was said, who had been "given" to the Tory team—Benjamin Disraeli. He had taken the extinction of his brief premiership, in 1868, with unruffled calm, and sat down to wait, as he had already waited from late youth to early old age, for the hour of his triumph. He was not perturbed by the extraordinary energy and success with which Mr. Gladstone's ministry seemed to be managing the affairs of the nation. Peace abroad, economy at home, one great measure of reform following another—these were not enough. Education and the ballot, a purged civil-service and a simplified law, a reformed army and a lowered—perhaps a disappearing—income-tax, were not what the average elector was demanding at the moment. He took these things more or less as a matter of course. What he really wanted was for his politicians, like his novelists, to conjure up for him a dream world of romance and adventure, of dazzling coups, of boundless vistas, of pomp and magnificence and Empire. And this Disraeli could offer, with all the persuasiveness of the Oriental merchant unfolding his wares in the bazaar.

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Happy the nation that has nothing worse to fear than *ennui*! And this certainly seemed to be the lot of England in the years that immediately followed the Franco-German War. That war brought a period of unrest to a close. The sword had decided all that most obviously called for decision. The unity of Germany, of Italy, of the United States was established, beyond the possibility of dispute. It was a good time for the publishers of atlases—the patchwork confusion of Central Europe called for replacement by simpler, more rational boundaries. And these boundaries no nation, except beaten and crippled France, had much interest in altering.

England herself, like the business nation she was, lost no time in profiting by the dissensions of her rivals. The war had left her commercial leadership more unchallenged than ever, and had created a temporary demand for her products. Up to 1874, the volume of her foreign trade increased more rapidly than ever, employment was rife and investors bullish. As is the nature of bulls, these creatures proved to have charged blindly, and a period of depression and disappointment succeeded. It was discovered that in the eagerness to avoid the low returns that await capital in periods of prosperity, British investors had put much too much of their savings into capitalizing undeveloped or backward countries. Not for the last time, there was a slump in foreign investments, Turkey being the worst defaulter. A particularly disgraceful smash at home, that of the City of Glasgow Bank, produced a collapse of confidence among investors that fell not far short of a panic. But though the slump, like all other slumps, was thought at the time to be the worst on record, there was no question of the fabric of British prosperity being seriously undermined. Those who had suffered worst were those who, as Sir Robert Giffen put it, had invested so high and

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speculatively as practically to be living on their capital.

But investors were not to be baffled so easily. The problem was how to combine high returns with security on overseas investments, when capital employed at home fetched something round about a miserable three per cent. The dishonest old Turk could not be distrained upon, still less the Republics of South America or the States of the U.S.A. But there were large tracts of the earth that could be not only capitalized but prevented from defaulting on their interest. Of what use was a soldier who could not combine his honourable profession with that of bailiff, or of any Empire that did not pay dividends? The slump of the mid-seventies was calculated to start practical men thinking imperially.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRIT OF MANLINESS

It would be a mistake to think that during the early seventies the average Englishman's thoughts were greatly occupied with foreign or imperial matters. The country was still complacently insular, in spite of Matthew Arnold. The French influence, that had imparted brilliance and sparkle to aristocratic society in the eighteenth century, was only powerful in such limited spheres as those of fashion, cooking, and the pleasures of the half-world. In spite of the Crimean War, the tradition of hostility between the two nations persisted—a juvenile tug of war was still known as “French and English”. It was firmly believed that an ordinary Englishman was a superior being to any Frenchman whatever, from the fact of his being more manly. “French polish” was heartily despised. In Canon Farrar's school story *St. Winifred's*, the most odious of all the bully-villains who stalk through his pages has this nickname attached to him, and preludes his devilries with a Parisian and sardonic urbanity of phrase.

There was, indeed, something highly suspicious to John Bull in anything savouring of excessive politeness. He rather prided himself on what the Frenchman would have characterized as brutality. Even in the most exalted circles, there was a good deal of masculine horseplay and practical joking. In one typical country mansion a clergyman, who had indulged in an early dip in the lake, had his clothes abstracted by the sons of the house, and had finally to make his way back in a state of nudity,

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to be admitted by the governess. These same sons succeeded in nearly blinding another guest by offering him a cigar filled with gunpowder.

The foreigner who arrived at our shores was left in no doubt of the superior manliness of the English temperament. At the seaside town of Folkestone there was no more popular amusement than that of baiting the passengers who had just landed from the Channel steamers, often prostrated by sea-sickness. The Company had thoughtfully provided a path in the open for these victims to run the gauntlet between the boat and the train. This path was lined by an expectant mob. No sooner was the gangway down, than there was a delighted shout of "Here they come!" and the fun began. A green-faced sufferer would be asked if he would like a bit of mutton fat; a stout gentleman would be greeted with cries of "Here's Tichborne"; another, looking more dead than alive, would be consoled by the reflection that he wouldn't die till he was hung; while an old lady—if we may trust the authority of the *Graphic*—would be asked, "Have you been sick too?" and then shoved forward with the questioner's stick. The strict chaperonage to which young women were subjected will appear less unreasonable when we know that it was no uncommon experience for ladies to have their faces and clothes spat upon by roughs. There was little mercy or chivalry for the unprotected female in that manly environment.

A certain bucolic violence was considered by no means inconsistent with the character of a gentleman. Masters of hounds, in particular, were hardly considered up to their job unless they were capable of giving rein to ungovernable tempers in managing their fields. Of one famous old Master, in Devonshire, it is recorded that his habit of cursing was so ingrained that he once broke off in the midst of reading the Lord's prayer to his family and servants,

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to ask who in the name of Him he had just been addressing was an individual—whose carnal affections and eternal destiny were specified with a wealth of descriptive detail—crossing the lawn. The butler, rising from his knees, explained that this was the new keeper, upon which his employer, duly satisfied, resumed the prayer exactly where it had been left off. The old Duke of Cambridge owed no small part of the popularity he enjoyed in the army to the violence of his language. The speech that he rather unwillingly consented to make to an audience of gentlemen cadets, enjoining them to a greater strictness of moral behaviour, is surely one of the most forcible lay sermons on record—commencing, as it is said to have done, “You dirty little . . .” But no second performance seems to have been called for.

Nothing more characteristic of the time could be imagined than the conduct of E. M. Grace, cricketer and coroner, on being told by some spectator not to hold an inquest on a hand that he was wringing in agony after stopping some terrific cut to point. The coroner promptly dived into the crowd, seized the offender by the ear, and marched him publicly off the ground.

There is perhaps some connection between this aggressive manliness and the almost equally aggressive hairiness flaunted by the male sex at this time. The Dundrearys of the sixties were going out of fashion, only to become joined together into full-bottomed beards. In the *Graphic* advertisement columns of the 18th of August, 1877, a certain Mr. Mechi, a London shop-keeper, thus reminiscently addresses “his old friends and customers, the public”: “It is now fifty years ago since I first commenced a business in Leadenhall Street, and what changes have taken place! Then everyone shaved and my razor and razor strop trade was immense; now moustache and beard are the order

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of the day, and the razor and strop trade is completely defunct." It was pre-eminently the decade of beards, though whiskers still gave point to the joke about entangled ear-rings, and the moustache was also beginning to lengthen and thicken and sometimes droop with a walrus-like suggestion, the impression aimed at being obviously one of virile fierceness. Mr. Kipling's dreadfully fast young thing of the eighties, whom scandal reported, with bated breath, to have compared a moustacheless kiss to an egg without salt, was probably voicing a pretty general, though it is to be hoped generally unexpressed feminine verdict. Such flaunting symbols of masculinity as the heavy dragoon's correspondingly heavy moustache, the mandril's scarlet nose, and the stag's antlers, usually have a sexual significance.

But the male sex was already grievously handicapped in the matter of self-expression by the ban that had been imposed upon the display of colour, except on special occasions, or to a severely limited extent. Even the soldier, in England, was not allowed the advantage of his uniform for a moment longer than it was required for professional purposes. The scarlet—absurdly called pink—of the hunting field, had been more or less in the same category so long as hunting had been a pursuit confined to gentlemen and to ladies—by courtesy—of the Lucy Glitters type. But now, if the scarlet would not come to the ladies, the ladies went to the scarlet by joining in the chase themselves, where, by a strange reversion to the past, they themselves appeared in sober and inconspicuous hues, while the male flaunted his scarlet coat, his gilded buttons, and his contrasted white stock and breeches, in the light of day.

One pleasing way of relieving the drabness of male attire was by the use of flowers. One of a fashionable young man's chief pre-occupations was with the daily selection and arrangement of his buttonhole.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN OF THE PERIOD

The woman of the seventies, if she still had to wait for her rights in other things, was accorded greater freedom than the male in the creation of what is now known as sex-appeal. With the coming of the seventies that freedom began to be used, more frankly than before, as a tight-fitting cloak of lasciviousness. It has always been a feminine object either to stimulate male desire by the exposure and emphasis of some part of the body, or to excite the imagination by concealment and mystery. The fifties and sixties had been dominated by the idea of romance, and had used both methods accordingly. The most romantic part of the body was what was delicately alluded to as the bosom, and accordingly such special opportunities for attracting a mate as those of the ballroom were exploited by a dress cut low enough to expose the division of the breasts. But the lower part of the body remained shrouded, or rather crinolined, in discreet mystery. The wintry moon of romance would never have thrown warm gules on Madeleine's fair sit-upon. The prime object of the tremendous lower expansion that the crinoline was one method of securing, was to impart a suggestion of queenly dignity and a certain aloofness. If it did have the disadvantage of making young women much too much like dowagers, it was an invitation to romantic swains to strive for a prize of such super-feminine attractions, half-angel and half-bird, a legless, passionless icicle to all beyond the confines of that majestic canopy.

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But the seventies saw a highly significant change in the method of feminine approach. Even before the opening of the decade, the idea of mystery was becoming a little played out. The crinoline had gone, at first only in favour of a voluminousness of skirt that produced much the same effect. But soon the intention became apparent to give the go-by to the romantic imagination, and reinforce the appeal of upper by that of the lower part of the body. Attention was now solicited for the buttocks. The fashion was not original. Posterior adornment is an art successfully practised by the males of numerous species of monkeys, and in certain African tribes rival beauties compete in the exaggeration of what to a European is the humblest part of the anatomy. It was fortunately not necessary for civilized women to torture themselves, like their black sisters, in order to stick out plausibly behind. The Northern climate and Christian religion secured that this latest attraction should, even if advertised, be kept under cover. Beneath skirt and petticoat, it was possible to suggest the presence of an even more enormous protuberance than could be raised on the banks of Timbuctoo. Hence the false buttock, the pullback or bustle, with which women did not hesitate to cumber themselves in the cause of sexual selection.

This lasted, more or less, till the end of the eighties. It was during the first phase, up to about 1875, that the exaggeration of the buttocks was carried to its greatest length. Then came five years or so of reaction. It was, in fact, suspected that the hips might exercise an equal or superior fascination, and accordingly dresses were drawn to the utmost possible tightness and smoothness across them, while the bustle dwindled at last to nothing, though its suggestiveness was retained to some extent by looping up the back of the dress. But during the eighties the pendulum swung back again, and enormous

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buttocks—or the suggestion of them—became the modest pride of maid and matron.

It was not only below the waist that feminine charms were obtruded. There was a frank suggestiveness about the costume of the seventies that embraced the whole body in its purview. The curves of the figure were seductively exaggerated in front as well as behind. If the bustle was used to swell out the hinder parts, the same office could be performed for the breast by suitable padding, and it is quite obvious, from pictures and photographs, that this expedient was freely employed, unless we are to believe that women of the seventies had considerably more expansive busts than those of normal times. To complete the effect, the *chignon*, or piled-up back hair, had to undergo an expansion proportionate to that directly beneath it. The resources of the average human head, being unequal to furnishing the enormous amount of hair required for this purpose, had to be supplemented from outside, one reputed source of supply being the hair cut off in hospital from fever patients.

Apart from this stuffing out of what were supposed to be the most attractive parts of the figure, every effort was made to enhance its charms by making the clothes fit as tightly as a glove. We have seen how this had been done to show off the curve of the hips; the method was equally applicable to the belly, which was advertised with a frankness—in certain types of costume—that left nothing except colour to the imagination. All sorts of means were employed to produce this clinging tightness, so different from the ample proportions of the sixties. The Empress of Austria was even said to have had her riding habit sewed on over her naked skin.¹ There was talk of chamois leather underclothing towards the end of the decade—a horribly frowsty expedient.

¹ *Modes and Manners of the XIX Century*, Fischel and Boehn, Vol. IV, p. 82.

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It was not enough to exaggerate the female posterior, it also called for adornment. This was no doubt highly inconvenient, as it was obviously a matter of extreme difficulty to take a seat without crushing such elegant additions.

"Shall we sit down?" asks a gentleman at a dance—according to *Punch*—and receives the pathetic reply, "I should like to, but my dressmaker says I mustn't."

It was, in fact, a regular duty of a partner to tear off such portions of the cascade of tulle as happened to get detached in the course of dancing. Ladies invariably returned home with considerably less behind them than when they had set forth. This did not entail the scrapping of the dress itself, which might last for a good many dances, but it always required to have its "waterfall" renewed between each of them.

There was never a time when the dictates of health and hygiene were more utterly ignored in the pursuit of sexual attractiveness. Frances Power Cobbe, one of the pioneers of female emancipation, enumerates, among the causes of "the little health of women", ferocious tight-lacing, heavy dragging skirts, high-heels, pullbacks, discouragement of appetite, and lack of healthy occupation for mind and body. And yet a belief was growing up in the advantages of outdoor exercise. The clash between the new ideals and the old was apt to produce grotesque results. How the first lady tennis players, with their skirts, gaily beribboned fore and aft and drawn tightly round the hips and knees, ever got the ball over the net—if they ever did—remains a mystery.

Looking back through the illustrated weeklies of the period, we shall find that the craze for hiking was rife as early as 1877. It is no longer, we are told, the fashion for girls and women to be delicate. Wives have taken to accompanying their husbands,

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sisters their brothers, on walking tours. It is advisable, therefore, to know what luggage to take, or rather to send on such a tour.

It would be well, the lady hiker is told, to have forwarded to the first proposed halting-place two large trunks—those monstrous receptacles that are still occasionally to be found in lumber rooms—containing linen, dress bonnets, hats, and all manner of miscellaneous finery. The linen trunk should be liberally provided with paper cuffs, collars, and fancy dibs. The dress trunk should contain a black silk costume, with a good, plain, long train skirt, and two bodices, with bows and ruchings and collars according to the complexion. In addition to the trunks, four stylish hats and bonnets are to be packed in a square carton box, the feathers and flowers having been previously detached and arranged in the aforesaid box.

As for the actual hiking costume, this is to be made so as to touch the ground, the skirt to be either looped up with two buttons or tied up with strings. Beneath this flops a finely quilted alpaca petticoat, on either side of which is a wide, deep pocket, in which are to be crammed a perfect museum of things, including easy slippers, a large Shetland shawl, a small flannel dressing-jacket, brush, comb, and comprehensive work-case, but not, apparently, a toothbrush. The hat need only be trimmed with a band and small wing. A mackintosh cape with a covering of the same material for the hat completes an equipment which makes that of the White Knight seem sane and economical.

As for bathing costumes, these, we are told, are becoming more stylish every season. Slender figures are recommended to wear loose, full, trousers reaching to the ankles and a short blouse fastened in at the waist, while the stout ones would do best to wallow in long jackets.

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Let us conclude this list by specifying the kind of dress recommended for breakfast at a country house visit.

“White cambric, the front and side breadth made with alternate strips of torchon lace insertion and gathered cambric; petticoat of rose-pink cambric; fichu to match; a quaint little pink and white cambric hat, trimmed with convolvulus.”

Does this, one asks, mean that the wearer has breakfast in her room? The dress would seem to point to it—but why, in that case, a hat trimmed with convolvuli? ¹

Such details may be esteemed unworthy the dignity of historical record. But there are few things that give a better insight into the spirit of an age than its fashions. Those of the seventies point to a reversion from a rather prudish romanticism to a frank sensuousness, such as had been heralded by the poems of Swinburne. Not that there was any marked decrease in prudery—such a title to a play as *The New Magdalen* was considered gravely indelicate, and an amended version of *John Peel* was still in vogue for those families who did not like so blasphemous a suggestion as that John Peel’s view-halloo would awaken the dead. It was as late as the eighties that a man was left to drown in a lake because some ladies in a boat were too modest to fish him out naked. But Prudery is ever the handmaid of Lubricity masking as her enemy.

It seems to have been felt, towards the end of the sixties, that a new spirit was beginning to capture the rising generation of women. Mrs. Lynn Linton wrote a series of slashing articles in the *Saturday Review* about “the Girl of the Period . . . a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion—a creature whose sole idea of life is fun, whose sole aim is unbounded

¹ All these are to be found in the *Graphic*, 1st August 1877.

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luxury ; and whose dress is the chief object of such thought and intellect as she possesses". Or as a rhymster puts it:

Dresses dropt 'neath palpitating shoulders,
Dresses raised to show the moulded knee ;
Thus these girls of *theirs* attract beholders,
Careless what bewitched beholders see.

Shocking indeed when England's budding womanhood

finds for model the Hetaira—
In her wickedest and fastest mood.

Making every allowance for journalistic exaggeration—and on so popular a theme—we can hardly doubt that there must have been some fire beneath this smoke, a fire which self-appointed censors of morality did not hesitate to characterize at the time as that of Hell, but which many of our own contemporaries would welcome as the evidence of a healthy animality.

Gone was the round-faced virginity of Leech's ringleted darling, the seductive blend of innocence and dependence that had done such execution among the heavy swells of the mid-century. It was as if the new generation were suffering from an inferiority complex, and nervously anxious to assert its claims to equal and something more than equal consideration against masculine arrogance.

Punch, that unrivalled mirror of average opinion, talks in 1874 of the "loudness, fastness and slang of the girl of the period". It was what we should consider very mild slang nowadays—such expressions as "awfully jolly sad", and a use of "ain't" on all possible occasions. But *Punch* also introduces us to a new type of young woman, his Miss Sharpleigh or Miss Sinical, whom he apparently admires rather than otherwise, and who specializes in cutting and ill-natured repartees.

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When some innocent young man remarks to his partner that reversing has gone out, he is annihilated by the information that it has never come in, and the still more unfortunate swain who confides that the sight of a ghost would leave him a chattering idiot is promptly asked : " Have you seen a ghost ? " which does not appear to be humour of a much more subtle or urbane description than the private school-boy's reply to the interrogation " What ? "

" Squat !

You're a fool and I'm not."

The evidence not only of the printed word, but of still living memory, suggests that social intercourse must have been, to say the least of it, rather exhausting. The criticism that Matthew Arnold made about the brutality of English letters in the sixties, would apply equally to English polite conversation in the seventies. We get the impression of a kind of competitive smartness, a polish as of rapiers. To score gracefully or neatly off some member of the company was much to be desired, and not to be able to keep up the interchange of rather stilted badinage was to proclaim oneself a social failure. In the hands of the less conversationally gifted members of society, this sort of thing could hardly fail to degenerate into open rudeness.

There is a valuable little book, current at this time, which shows very clearly the kind of talk to be aimed at in really genteel circles. It is called *Society Small Talk*, and purports, like more than one similar treatise of a later date, to emanate from a Member of the Aristocracy. Its general get-up, and the distinguished publishing house from which it emanates, suggest at least a circulating library audience.

The modern reader will at first be inclined to suspect that the whole thing is a leg-pull, but a

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careful examination will convince him that the manual is perfectly serious, and compiled with a good deal of care and ingenuity. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of this kind of conversation, as compared with that of our own day, is its extraordinary sex-consciousness. A woman is seldom allowed to be an ordinary human being; the tone adopted towards her by men is either one of stereotyped adulation or else of bantering superiority. One notes the constantly recurring references to "you ladies" or "we ladies", while no gentleman seems able to get out two consecutive sentences without some reference to the entirely stereotyped personal attractions of his fair and charming partner. We wonder what a bright young thing of the nineteen-thirties would make of an airy nothing—to adopt the vernacular of the seventies—couched in the following terms:

"I envy that butterfly perched so daintily on your hair close to that shell-like ear. What secrets would I not whisper were I so near! Happy butterfly!"

Her reply would most probably be a plain intimation to her partner that he was tight. Not so that of her grandmother. She would not, like great-grandmother, have blushed all over—the remark would not have struck her in the light of an amorous declaration, but of a conversational challenge. And if she did not want to be put down as a hopeless fool, she would have had to counter with some such remark as:

"The butterfly is not so happy as you think; I shut it up in a velvet case when I go home for fear of losing it. Now one could not shut you up . . ."

And this sort of sparring might go on between a couple of practised hands, till the music struck up for the next dance.

Or let us listen to the conversation at a dinner party, one of eight people, and every one of them a master, or mistress, of verbal fence.

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Mr. A. leads off by remarking that the illness of a certain Lord is believed to have come from the shock to his system caused by drinking iced water.

"Not a bit of it," cuts in Mr. B., who, having killed two birds with one stone by contradicting Mr. A. and displaying his superior knowledge of aristocratic maladies, then proceeds to an intriguing fragment of autobiography: "I have drunk water all my life, and the shocks my system has received have not sprung from that source."

Here Mrs. C., a cheerful soul, takes up the running:

"Shocks are very serious things, I think; that which affects the body too often affects the mind, the one reacting upon the other; that is why I think sudden death is so terrible to the survivors, though I must not be lugubrious. I was thinking of something rather sad that I heard before I came here to-night, but I ought to bring a merry heart to a feast."

Whereupon the host, Mr. D., seeing an opportunity for a compliment, pounces with:

"In bringing yourself, Mrs. C., you bring the best part of the feast."

But he has exposed a flank to Miss E., who does her best to put him out of countenance by asking what in that case were she herself and Mrs. F., and whether there are not any compliments in Mr. D.'s store for them too. But Mr. D. is equal to the occasion.

"A hundred, my dear Miss E., if you would only give me the opportunity of making them; opportunity is a great ally."

The company in general, and Mrs. D. in particular, are given no time to wonder precisely what D. is driving at, or who he is getting at, for Mr. G. caps him by observing sagely that propinquity is an even greater ally than opportunity.

"Half the marriages that take place are, I should

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say, the result of propinquity and opportunity combined."

The conversation is now fairly started off upon the subject of the tender passion, and goes on merrily, with a strong seasoning of arch personalities, for the rest of the meal.

The most surprising of all conversational leads is one recommended for a fashionable musical party :

"I suppose one ought not to talk while the music is going on, but I should like to tell you a story I heard the other day."

To which "the most flattering rejoinder", though hardly flattering to the poor singer, is said to be :

"Oh please do, I should so like to hear it."

It is again necessary to assure the reader that this was perfectly serious advice, and that it probably did not strike anyone to regard it in a different light—during the seventies.

All letters and memoirs and reminiscences of that time show to what an extent the business of pleasure was a whole-time job. The lives of those who could afford not to work—an immensely larger proportion of the community than nowadays—seem to have been passed in a perpetual round of balls, dinners, musical parties, small-and-earlies, and tea drinkings—now ceasing to be known as kettledrums—while in the country there were archery, croquet, tennis, picnics and river parties galore. The strict limitations upon feminine activities during the mid-century were being gradually relaxed, and most women had a good deal more liberty without any idea of the more serious interests that were as yet the monopoly of a small, earnest and dowdy band of New Women. It is during this period that even that crusty old Radical Mr. Punch begins to put off his middle-class earnestness, and transfers his interest from the old codgers of Leech to the social butterflies and pushers of Du Maurier.

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If we must provide decades with nicknames, the Frivolous Seventies would seem a good deal more to the point than the Naughty Nineties. Frivolity was the keynote of that time—the light-heartedness and light-headedness of those who take their world and its permanence so much for granted, that it never occurs to them to be really serious about anything. As long as the ice held and there were no danger boards, so long the skaters were free to devote their whole attention to the pretty, meaningless figures they were cutting on the surface. God could always be relied upon to provide against a thaw. For it was still—to that extent—a God-believing time.

CHAPTER IV

THE GENTEEL ENVIRONMENT

If we are right in accepting the evidence of clothes as expressing the spirit of the time, we may expect to find this evidence confirmed by that of furniture and household decoration. The interior, of course, changes less quickly than a costume, for though clothes seldom last for more than a few years at the outside, a good piece of furniture may remain in use for centuries. But taste—including bad taste—is not to be denied, and even things that were originally beautiful may be turned to uses

Quite from the purpose of the things themselves.

In the seventies there was a change of taste corresponding closely enough to the change of fashion. The earlier Victorian surroundings had often been ugly enough in all conscience, though it must not be forgotten that that age could produce one of the greatest of all English masters of interior decoration in Alfred Stevens. This ugliness, even at its worst, had a certain honesty that made it expressive of something, if only of the solid and smug respectability that its owners prized more than virtue. There is a portentous dignity about those horsehair sofas and mahogany wardrobes that, if it reminds us rather of a provincial mayor standing on his hearthrug and sticking out his stomach, is not without a certain endearing quaintness that you get in faded daguerreotypes of family groups.

But the new fashions are ceasing to be concerned with dignity, and are beginning to reflect the com-

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mercial spirit and hustling tempo of the age by straining after obvious and showy effects, cramming all the goods, as one might say, into the shop window. This we have noted in our study of clothes, where the art of advertisement is being developed on modern lines, though the part of the body on which it is chiefly displayed is hardly to be described as a frontage. These lavish additions, these insertions and flounces and enlargements are, however, by no means confined to one part of the dress; from where bonnet balances insecurely on coiffure to where skirt meets dirt there is the same effect of overcrowding, the itch to get the utmost value for money out of every detail, regardless of proportion and unity.

We have a vivid description of one of the newly built houses in a district like Kensington in an excellent little manual on House Decoration by two Miss Garretts, published in 1876. "With the outside aspect of this house", they say, "everyone is familiar. We need not therefore stop to describe the stucco and the graining, the frills and the furbelows, the frantic efforts of the builder to make everything appear what it is not. . . ." Putting "dress-maker" instead of "builder" this would serve as an excellent description of the type of dress that perhaps—is it too cynical to suggest?—the authoresses themselves were constrained to wear at the time these lines were penned.

It was not only a question of choice but of necessity. Machine production was beginning to tighten its grip on home and workshop. The enormously increased and increasing population had to be housed as well as fed, and this was beyond the resources of handiwork. And now it was becoming apparent that Gresham's Law, "Bad money drives out good", had its analogy in other spheres than that of finance. In a machine age, artistically bad products drive out good, for the reason that they can be turned out in

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greater quantities for less money. John Ruskin might preach and William Morris might put into practice the traditions of sound and loving craftsmanship that had inspired the Middle Ages, but Gothic itself was capable of being seized upon by the enterprising capitalist, and turned out correctly to style in his factories. What did the ordinary Philistine care, or know, about any difference between hand-made and standardized detail except that of price? And when things of real beauty were fashioned as they were by William Morris, the high price of so restricted a product prevented it from reaching more than a small minority of the well-to-do.

It was, indeed, the ironic fate of those who strove hardest to encourage the love and understanding of the arts, that their efforts should have contributed to the triumph not of the Muses they served but of the commercial Mammon they detested. The more there was discovered and written about art, the easier it became to standardize mechanically the style of this or that period, until the whole environment of God's image was put into cheap fancy dress, and such abominations were achieved as the Tudor Lounge of a hotel and the Louis Seize smoking-room of a liner, until—to come down to our own time—the motorist out of town passes between interminable white ranks of Baronial Mansions on one side of the road, and Comfy Palaces on the other, where a few months before smiled the open country-side.

The seventies had not learnt enough about the Muses to prostitute them on this heroic scale; what they did was in more naïve defiance of good taste and artistic decency. Their one object seemed to be to make the greatest possible display on the cheap. The Miss Garretts have a chapter on "Houses as they are" which should be read by every one who wants to realize of what the seventies were really capable.

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They usher us into the hall through "a front door that looks like bronze and feels like wood". We find the walls covered with paper made to imitate marble, "the kind of marble imitated being supposed to indicate the financial condition of the owner". Doors and woodwork are disguised as oak or walnut or marble. The staircase is lit by a stentorian window of ground glass with a violently coloured border. The balustrade is of cast iron tortured into fantastic shapes and enriched with coarsely moulded ornamentation, probably emphasized by gilding.

The dining-room is calculated to sit heavier on the soul than the greasiest and stodgiest meal that even an English cook is capable of sending up to it. The walls are covered with crimson and gold paper or alternatively painted pale green; the mantelpiece is of black marble, the curtains of crimson rep; the sideboard is of mahogany, surmounted by a curly mirror, and curved and distorted with misbegotten ingenuity to contradict every principle of sound construction. Plain or gilded wicker screens, then just coming into fashion, protect the room from the gaze of passers by. For this, the public ought to have been grateful.

As for the drawing-room, this is at the mercy of feminine taste, and of what that taste was capable we have already gained some inkling in the matter of clothes. Here we have "a watered gold or sky-blue paper hung upon the walls . . . enrichments of ceiling and cornice with all colours of the rainbow . . . a carpet whereupon the whole contents of a conservatory have been upset . . . a round centre table whose legs bristle with leaves and flowers and twining snakes all glued together in one shapeless mass; and the chairs *en suite* and covered with turquoise blue rep, their brilliance preserved from tarnish by crocheted antimacassars". The sofa is a horror of little ease and less beauty, with lumpy

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padding, head one way and legs the other, and ornament made to stick out wherever it can be most in the way. There are bright green silk panels on the walnut piano; there is a cabinet of unplausibly imitated buhl; there is also a walnut chiffonier. An appropriate setting, we cannot help thinking, for its fair inmates, with their stuffed chignons and bedizened buttocks.

We may accompany our guides for a moment into the bedroom. Here the state of things is even more lamentable, because the builder, having lavished all his attention on the "show" rooms, has made these as square and dark and dingy as possible. There are whity-grey wallpaper, maple-painted woodwork, flimsy sashes, much too weak for the big sheets of plate glass that they contain, a muddy-looking chimney-piece of marble or some composition resembling it, a cast-iron grate that looks as if no fire could ever burn cheerfully in it, white finger plates and handles to the doors. The bed is of brass or iron, but the furniture-maker being ashamed of this new fashion, has plastered it with ormolu ornament and twisted it out of all straightness and simplicity. The wardrobe affords the greatest opportunity of all for the display of bad taste and bad workmanship. Panels of dark wood frowning at the light wood of which the rest is made, imitation inlaying painted on the surface, prehistoric flowers and birds . . . after this specimen we may forbear to inspect wash-stand, looking-glass, and other items, catalogued indifferently as Gothic, Medieval, or Early English. The very recital of such horrors becomes painful after a time.

Let us take one typical advertisement of the kind that were published daily in the seventies:

"FINE ITALIAN WALNUT DRAWING-ROOM FURNITURE, comprising a luxurious lounge, lady's and gentleman's easy and six well-carved chairs upholstered

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in rich silk, centre table on massive carved pillar and claws, the top beautifully inlaid with marqueterie, large size chimney glass in handsome oil-gilt frame, chiffonière with marble top, lofty plate-glass back and three doors; lady's work table lined with silk, occasional table on spiral supports, two papier maché chairs and coffee table to match, five tier what-not, pair of handsome ruby lustres, and gilt and steel fender and fire irons, with ormolu heads, etc., etc., etc."¹

By no means all people in the seventies rested content with an attitude of universal and complacent Philistinism in matters of taste. Such an accusation would have been hotly resented by many ladies who prided themselves upon the artistic appearance of their drawing-rooms. There was probably more written and talked during that decade about the conscious pursuit of beauty than during all the previous years of the reign put together. It is a mistake to imagine, as some people do nowadays, that the æsthetic movement began with Oscar Wilde in the eighties. It was in full swing at least by 1875, and if it had a literary prophet, it was not Wilde, but Walter Pater. It was also closely connected with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, now of a generation's standing, no longer therefore a heresy, but a thing to be admired by people who would be thought cultured. Du Maurier's æsthetic women, like Mrs. Cimabue Brown, were obviously trying to look like Rossetti or Burne-Jones pictures.

The æsthetic fashion, when it asserted its sway over the drawing-room, did so in two principal ways. The first was in a craze for musical parties, at which, by those who could afford it, the most celebrated singers and musicians were engaged to perform. If the jokes of the time are anything to go by, these parties must have been rather trying affairs, a large

¹ Cited in *The Drawing Room*, by Mrs. Orrinsmith.

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part of the audience regarding them as an excuse for flirtation or gossip, in tones more or less subdued.

More lasting in its effects was the passion for acquiring the products of Chinese and Japanese art. This was nothing new. Readers of Wycherley will remember how one of his funniest and bawdiest scenes is concerned with a *double entente* on the meaning of the word "china". Queen Mary of Orange was an enthusiastic collector, and gets soundly rapped over the knuckles for her pains by Macaulay. So the "Chinamania", as it was called at the time, might have been classed as a revival, much to be desired, of a time-honoured custom. But not only was the taste of Victorian England very different from that of William and Mary's day, but the Far East had changed too. China might still, in spite of the violence and extortion to which she was subjected by Christian civilization, be essentially the same China as that of 1700, but a new Japan was even now coming into being, and it was the art of that country that principally excited the admiration of the English æsthetes. In 1700 very little had been known about Japan, because her people had had as much experience as they desired of intercourse with the West, and had very sensibly determined to isolate themselves and preserve their civilization intact. But this did not happen to suit a capitalist civilization with goods to unload, and so the closed door had been blown open by cannon. The Japanese, again very sensibly, decided that if they could not lead their own lives, they would transform themselves into the likeness of foreign devils, and give the West as much intercourse as it desired, and even more.

There is an old story about a magician's servant who stole his master's wand, and succeeded in summoning up an obsequious demon whom he ordered, as a first experiment, to fetch some water. But he

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found it a less easy matter to stop the demon once he was started off, and bucket after bucket was emptied at an incredible rate into the room, until the whole place was flooded.

In the seventies, however, no one would have dreamed that this story could in any way symbolize the relations of Japan with the West. The Japanese were a charming discovery, quaint and picturesque little people who lived in a topsy-turvy sort of world and made pretty, fragile things that were a pleasing contrast to the products of Victorian England. They were, besides, more than willing to supply these things, in unlimited quantity, for cash down.

It was true that the Japanese had, for centuries, been a people of exquisite taste. But they had also become a people with the keenest possible eye for the main chance. They had not the least intention of stripping their country of its choicest works of art for the benefit of barbarians. They had sized up these barbarians shrewdly, as being possessed of just enough sense to appreciate the beauty of their art in general, but not enough to discriminate between its best and its second-rate products. Even connoisseurs knew practically nothing as yet of the great classical masters, the strength of Sessiu, the fire of Motonobu, the swiftness of Keion. To them Japanese art had culminated in the colour prints of the Ukiyoye school, beautiful in themselves, but, to a Japanese, no more than popular work of a late and rather decadent period. This perhaps inspired the cunning islanders with the idea that their Western customers would not know how to distinguish between one Japanese product and another. Once they knew a thing was Japanese, they would take its artistic merits on faith.

One of the first lessons that Japan had learnt from the West was that the mass production of plausible shoddy pays more than faithful craftsmanship ex-

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pended on only a few things. The Chinese had not yet Westernized themselves to this extent—cheap willow-pattern ware was the product of European factories—but the Japanese soon acquired the faculty of turning out vast quantities of cheap and perishable goods, some of which found their way into every English drawing-room with the least pretensions to smartness. The best that can be said of these bamboo stands and tables and screens, of those ubiquitous paper fans, is that most of them have long ago fallen to pieces and gone to the rubbish heap. No doubt a certain number of really beautiful things were acquired, particularly in the early stages of the movement, but one of the chief effects of the Japanese influences was to substitute a new flimsiness for the old solidity.

It is probable that the change would have come about, even without Japanese help. The light and frivolous spirit of the time was entirely favourable to the multiplication of “arty” gimcracks all over the house. The excellent little manuals of household decoration, to which we have already referred, have no criticism to offer against the products of this new tendency. They are rather inclined to welcome any conscious striving for grace and beauty, after the dreadful ugliness against which it was a reaction. Can they be blamed for taking the æsthetic movement at its own valuation, and not perceiving how easy it would be to substitute for self-assertive ugliness, an imitative and shoddy prettiness, that, from the truly æsthetic standpoint, offered even less hope of salvation, but which might suit the jerry-builders of furniture very well indeed?

It is tragic that it should have been so, when one reflects how much real striving there was after the light of beauty. Even such small and forgotten manuals as those to which we have referred, or Eastlake's more ambitious *Principles of Household*

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Taste—books that can be read by anyone now with pleasure and profit—show how understanding was the desire for beautiful surroundings, at any rate among certain individuals. The forlorn hope of William Morris to revive the arts and crafts of an idealized Gothic in the midst of a Machine age is among the most heroic episodes in the war of the divine spirit in Man for liberation. But mechanical and mass-production, reinforced by an almost universal valuation of cheapness above beauty, was too strong for æsthetes and muses combined. Heaviness may endure for a night, but shoddy cometh in the morning.

CHAPTER V

WHISTLER V. RUSKIN

The æsthetes, with all their extravagances and affectations, had this to be said for them—they were trying to bring art into the daily life of their time. But art itself was beginning more and more, as the century drew towards a close, to shun contact with the world and retire into its own technique.

This new æsthetic of art for art's sake has so thoroughly captured the mind of our own age that it is difficult for us to be quite fair to the Victorian stalwarts who fought against it. In their view the function of the artist was to give outward and visible form to the spirit of his time. That at least was the opinion of John Ruskin, who, by the beginning of the seventies, had become something like a dictator in the field of art-criticism. The history of the rise and fall of Venice was, according to his masterpiece of prose, recorded faithfully in her stones. Such a conception of art was eminently suited to the temper of the Victorian Age. It was common ground to artist and Philistine. Both would have agreed that so far as art could be tolerated at all, it ought to be elevating. Beauty of expression was no excuse if the thing expressed was not good but evil. And of that good and that evil it was not for the connoisseur or the technician to judge, but for the men and women for whose benefit works of art are produced. It is in the dining-room and not in the kitchen that the quality of a meal is determined.

That the taste of the elder Victorians in æsthetics was often grossly at fault is common ground to us

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all. But perhaps we are hasty in condemning their philosophy on the strength of their practice. The fact is that the morality of the mid-nineteenth century rested on very insecure foundations. It might even be described as essentially immoral in that it aimed at preserving an outward appearance of respectability, instead of going to the root of the matter and creating a new heart and a right spirit within. It is one thing to say that beauty is truth, truth goodness—three in one and one in three—it is quite another to say that art shall be the expression and the artist the slave of a bogus morality. Thus when the Dean of St. Paul's refused to allow Alfred Stevens to put the equestrian statue over Wellington's monument, on the ground that a horse could not be tolerated in a church, he was wickedly impoverishing God's House for the sake of his own blasphemous caprice. When Ruskin set himself up to judge and condemn every master, from Michelangelo to Whistler, whose merits he had not the patience or humility to discover, he was coming dangerously near to committing unforgivable sin. The fault with these moralists was that they were not moral enough.

One thing always brought up against the Victorians is the importance they attached to the subjects of their pictures. They dearly loved a picture with a story. They were by no means unique in this preference, since many, perhaps the majority, of the world's greatest masterpieces are pictures with stories. There are, for instance, Velasquez' *Surrender of Breda*, Leonardo's *Last Supper*, and that glorious *Crucifixion* of Tintoretto, in the Scuola of San Rocco, which embodies a loftier ideal of Christianity than any written treatise on theology. Among English artists, Hogarth, whom Whistler himself admired more than any other, was frankly and unashamedly a teller of stories on canvas. But the Victorians, with Ruskin at their head, were inclined to treat pictures

in practice, if not in theory, as if the plot, or story, were the only thing that counted. Moreover it had to be a plot with a moral tacked on from the outside and not implicit in the soul of the composition. That moral was more often than not one of the immoral respectabilities of Victorian convention.

Thus the Victorians, when they tried to tell stories of a sublime or religious nature, succeeded in being about as convincing as some disgruntled bachelor announcer commandeered to function in the children's hour as Uncle Heliogabalus. When Christ figures upon a Victorian stained-glass window, He might well be mistaken for Mr. Chesterton's "hell-instructed grocer in a chapel made of tin", who has somehow contrived to glue a plate on to the back of his head. When the Victorians try to depict some incident in history, it is the sort of history that small boys are expected to mug up in their textbooks, in which dummies in costume pose as unconvincingly as tailors' waxworks. The incidents are not felt—there is no soul to be torn out of these stories.

The Victorians had, however, made one branch of pictorial story-telling their own. It was a time of great illustrators, and it is probable that at some future day Victorian black and white illustrations will be more eagerly sought after by collectors than more ambitious contemporary efforts on canvas. Nearly every one of the great artists of the sixties turned his hand, with success, to this humbler form of art, and the old Victorian magazines—*Good Words*, *The Quiver*, *Once a Week*, *The Churchman's Family Magazine*, and others whose very names seem redolent of Philistine smugness, turn out, on perusal, to be veritable treasure-houses of the peculiarly English art that had been handed on from the days of Rowlandson and Gillray without any breach of continuity.

Why this story-telling faculty was so brilliantly displayed on paper and so poorly on canvas is not

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easy to say. There is, of course, Frith, though it is hardly safe nowadays to mention his work without some sort of a sneer. To be seen looking at his *Derby Day*, which, to judge by the crowds of beholders, is about the most popular picture in the National Gallery, is almost to stamp oneself as an outsider. And yet if—as all the critics assure us—this sort of thing is not art, it must be something else almost equally desirable. For surely we can get as deeply into the life, and even the soul, of that age, by studying this picture, or Frith's other one of Paddington Station, as we can by any other means at present available to us.

In the seventies, the great illustrators were still at work, and a new master of the coloured page rose to fame in Caldecott. *Punch* was fortunate enough to number among his staff perhaps the three greatest exclusively black and white artists of their time, Charles Keene, with his matchless power of hitting off the exact shade of an expression—a strangely un-Victorian figure in his austere avoidance of any sort of prettiness, Du Maurier, the social historian of an age of transition, Tenniel, as representative a Victorian as Tennyson or Watts or Gladstone, with his high seriousness of purpose and consciousness of his mission to immortalize the life and adventures, week by week, of a noble and puissant nation.

Apart from the illustrators, it can hardly be said that British art had succeeded in realizing much more than—what was after all the supreme ideal of the Victorians—a dignified respectability. It is true that the leaders of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood continued to turn out excellent work, embodying their view that artistic genius consisted in an infinite capacity for taking pains. But their standard-bearer, Millais, had long since sold whatever he had possessed of soul for a place in the sunshine of academic popularity—and few are the lodging-house parlours with-

out their *Bubbles* or *Black Brunswick*—and the Pre-Raphaelites had ceased to be a dynamic influence. Their movement belonged, essentially, to the mid-century romanticism that was now visibly on the wane, though the advent of Burne-Jones, with his anæmic and almost sexless purity, galvanized it into some semblance of a second birth.

On the whole, John Bull felt that he had as much reason to be satisfied with his art, at the beginning of the seventies, as he was with his trade and his literature and his progress generally. It was, as we have indicated, respectable, reasonably competent, and all the better from having no element of unhealthy excitement about it. That sort of thing could be left to the red fool fury, or impressionist *flair*, of the Seine, though, to do it justice, the Paris Salon displayed as inquisitorial a zeal in the suppression of disturbing novelty as the English Academy—it was only by the intervention of Napoleon III that Manet and his fellow innovators got their canvases hung in the famous Salon of the Rejected.

If we could take an excursion into the past, and visit one of the Royal Academy exhibitions of the seventies, we should probably find the experience depressing. We should pass from landscape to landscape, each one heavier and duller than the last, each with the same predominance of browns and mustards, most of them soberly autumnal. We should look out upon oily and sullen seas, which seem as if they had never known the innumerable laughter of sunlight on waves. We should glance at story pictures—but no more than glance, for they are mostly either of a rather obvious pathos, or of a slightly ponderous whimsicality. And there would be classical pictures, coldly unexceptionable, or affording a decent excuse for studying modern young ladies in a state, not of nudity, but stark nakedness. There might be one or two exceptions—some truly

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Apollonian creation of Leighton's, some charming pink and white decorative composition by Albert Moore, some noble portrait by Watts—but these would only serve to emphasize the tameness of the majority.

But then, we might reflect, the show was not arranged for casual visitors pitchforked backwards out of the future. If we could listen to the conversation of the frock-coated and bustle-encumbered crowd that drifted past us, we should realize that most of them were thoroughly and even aggressively satisfied with things as they were. It was curious, in an age that prided itself on its material progress, that on the spiritual and artistic side of life there should have been so deep-rooted a fear of disturbing the *status quo*. The fury aroused against the æsthetes of the seventies was essentially the same as that which had not yet subsided against evolutionists and ritualists. There was an almost religious fervour about the way in which *Punch* contrived to pillory any artist, poet or critic whom he suspected of advanced tendencies. Among his victims were the "swine-born" Swinburne, Walter Pater, Burne-Jones—"the still unburnt Jones, the Burne to which no traveller returns", Watts, and Whistler—not to speak of Wagner.

When an army is fighting a defensive battle, there is often some vital point or position that acquires a symbolic importance quite out of proportion to its real value, so that it becomes a matter of vital honour to defend it at all costs. Such were Ypres and Verdun for the Allies in the last war. Such was the infallibility of the first chapter of Genesis, for the clergymen who opposed Darwin. And such, for the conservative die-hards of art, was the authority of the great John Ruskin, now no longer a heretic, but a Slade Professor, and pillar of an orthodoxy that he himself had created.

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He was the oddest figure that had ever been selected for such a rôle, for in spite of the intense seriousness with which he took himself and induced others to take him, he was more incurably eccentric than any other of the great Victorian individualists. He was, besides, the evangelist of a social gospel that was anything but orthodox. Between 1866 and 1875, he was passing through a crisis that threatened to unseat his reason, and certainly did not tend to broaden his outlook or soften his prejudices. Not satisfied with a marriage that had never been consummated and had finally been annulled, he, now well on in middle age, must needs fall in love with an adoring girl child—just as the future Archbishop Benson had done, with happier results. When his mistress, for so Ruskin, in the Dantesque sense, characterized her, arrived at an age when Ruskin could propose marriage, he found that he had reckoned without the young lady's mother, herself an attractive woman some years his junior, and—for whatever reason—inclined to be bitterly resentful of this mature wooing. Delays were imposed, and then the tragedy deepened, for the girl, whose nervously unstable temperament had been subjected to intolerable strain, developed a tendency to religious mania. Ruskin found a more formidable rival than any mother could be in the Low Church Lord. He found himself, for all his lofty idealism and Biblical diction, a heathen man and a publican in his Rosie's eyes. How could she cease loving him? And yet—how could she marry him? The poor girl's mind was obviously torn with a conflict between admiration for her lover's personality and genius, and the inner consciousness that, as a lover, he could never suffice for her. The conflict proved insoluble. First the mind and then the body collapsed. There is a story—though on doubtful authority—that before she died she refused to see Ruskin unless he would perjure himself to the

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extent of declaring that he loved God more than her, which he, in his agony, refused to do. True or not, it is eminently characteristic of the relations between this tragic pair.

Ruskin entertained and even, with his naïve egoism, published to the world fears for his sanity. But not for a season were these fears destined to be realized. He addressed himself manfully to his work with such a fervour as must have inspired the Hebrew prophet when God had taken away the desire of his eyes with a stroke. In the position of unquestioned eminence that he now occupied, he had full scope alike for his genius and his eccentricities. He started his undergraduate admirers working as navvies on a road, that never served any more useful purpose than that of providing a certain amount of healthy exercise for the Elect, and agreeable chaff for the Philistines. He made the names of the Italian primitives familiar for the first time in Oxford Halls. He performed a priceless service for Venice and the world by unearthing the genius of Carpaccio. But what lay nearest to his heart was his ideal of a new social order to succeed the capitalist individualism that the vast majority of the class from which he had sprung found so good. He tried to form a society of enthusiasts devoted to the realization of his ideals—its guiding principle being obedience, obedience to John Ruskin. For years he expounded the principles of this society in a series of monthly letters bearing the cryptic title *Fors Clavigera*, but which would have been better named *The Book of the Prophet John*. Here he wrote, with glorious unrestraint, exactly as the spirit moved him, laying his lawless axe to the very roots of society. Society applauded, and thought what a charming creature Mr. Ruskin was.

But there was one sphere in which Ruskin's power was to be felt and known. As an art critic his authority was unquestioned, and like that of other

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autocrats, it tended to degenerate into irresponsible tyranny. His condemnation had the effect of an artistic death sentence. As a rhyme of the time put it :

I paints and paints,
Hears no complaints,
And sells before I'm dry,
But savage Ruskin
Sticks his tusk in,
And nobody will buy.

That tusk was inserted once too often. For there had arisen another prophet, who was called James, and who testified to things done across the narrow seas that were hidden from John.

For while English art continued complacently insular, another French Revolution was being accomplished in the salons. The cry was that of the dying Goethe, that of Turner, Ruskin's adored master, in his last phase, for light. And wonderful things had been discovered about light—how if you dabbed on primary colours in patches instead of mixing them on the palette, you could make the canvas glow and shimmer as never before ; how the same haystack might become a different haystack as the light changed from hour to hour ; how the painter must always be striving to render what the eye sees and not what the brain knows. There was an American artist—he would have been an American officer if he could have passed his examinations—who had studied in Paris and thrown himself into these new developments with an enthusiasm as great as that which had inspired the Pre-Raphaelite brethren. Not being too favourably received in Paris, he had come to testify in England to the faith that was in him.

Anyone less like the conventional idea of a prophet—anyone, in fact, more calculated to irritate and grieve Ruskin—than this James Whistler, it would

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have been difficult to imagine. Like Disraeli, he got himself up with an eyeglass and a drawl, in the part of an English gentleman, as that part is sometimes romanticized by those who are not English. He was a Disraeli with something of the astringency of a Swift. And to this he added a quality of his own that was peculiarly American, for he was one of the greatest masters that ever lived of the art of advertisement. He was determined to get not only his pose, but his art, and the principles it embodied, across the footlights.

"Ha, ha!" he had once exclaimed, focussing his eyeglass on some picture, "this man knows!"

That reveals his attitude of mind. He himself *knew*, not from theory, but because he had toiled and slaved after his knowledge—he knew no more than he had achieved. For those who, having achieved little or nothing, dared to lecture and disparage him who had borne the burden and heat of creation, he had a holy and consuming hatred. Do I not hate them, O creative beauty, that hate thee!

To hate was to attack, and with a deadliness of verbal sword-play worthy of Voltaire. One lightning thrust, and the fight was over. A highly respected critic had once pointed out that a symphony in white contained a brown dress and a blue ribbon. "*Bon dieu*," retorted Whistler, "... does he then, in his astounding consequence, believe that a symphony in F contains no other note, but shall be a continued repetition of F F F? ... Fool!" That was Whistler's way with his critics, and it was too much to expect that he would be suffered gladly. Soon all the bravos of the press were thrusting together at this lonely Cyrano.

But his wit and the sheer merit of his work kept them all at bay until he crossed the path of Ruskin. The collision was sooner or later inevitable. If it had only been that a solemn giant was trying to

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crush some bright and venomous insect—as to all outward appearances it was—the incident would have been trivial. Its real significance lay in the conflict between two gospels. For the prophet James was as much in earnest as the prophet John, and, if he were proved right, then was Ruskin, the art critic, one of those trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.

For to Ruskin art was the visible expression of a people's soul. But to Whistler she was apart, "selfishly occupied with her own perfection only—having no desire to teach", still less to do good. The less the people had to say about her, the better. The artist had no mission to help or ennoble his kind; he was no more than a specialist in a certain technique, and, as such, only amenable to the judgment of his peers. A mere literary interloper, like Ruskin, could no more judge of a picture than—to take an illustration from our own day—a person ignorant of the mathematics could check the conclusions of Einstein.

Thus, by Whistler's account, had the Muse earned her charter of freedom. But at what a price! For a world abandoning itself to headlong materialism, art had no message of salvation. Mankind might go to the devil in its own way, provided it allowed the artist to solve his technical problems in *his* own way. The attitude of the new æsthetic evangelist to the modern world was that of the early Christians to Roman civilization—they had no interest in its fortunes or preservation. Their kingdom was not of this world.

Whether such a faith was the logical outcome of the new impressionism is—to say the least of it—disputable. But no doubt the tendency of the impressionists was to concentrate on the purely technical aspects of art. In Whistler this tendency was carried to the point of libelling his own genius. Thus his superb portrait of his mother is, by his

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own account, a mere arrangement in grey and black. It *was* this, among other things of infinitely greater importance. "But what", asked Whistler scornfully, "can or ought the public to care about the identity of the portrait?"

When the battle was joined between the prophets of the old and the new dispensations, the *casus belli* bore little relation to the real issue at stake. Ruskin, in his insularity, knew little and cared less about the latest Parisian developments. Manet and Degas, Monet and Renoir, might as well have been painting houses as far as he was concerned. When Whistler began to reveal hitherto unperceived marvels of light on the banks of the Thames, transforming even London fog into a thing of wonder and beauty, Ruskin could not understand what he was about; the whole thing seemed to him sheer bluff and impertinence. And as if the gods had determined, in Greek fashion, to punish him for his presumption, he assailed Whistler in almost the same terms that the Philistines of an earlier day had applied to Turner. He was flinging a pot of paint in the public's face. Restraint was not Ruskin's strong suit, and his righteous indignation led him to fling about such epithets as "ill-educated conceit", "wilful imposture", "cockney impudence", and "coxcomb". This was part of one of the monthly pronouncements in *Fors Clavigera*.

It seemed this time as if the butterfly had really been crushed. The sale of Whistler's pictures, on which his livelihood depended, fell off. But in this almost desperate situation, he determined upon a *coup* of magnificent audacity. He would sue the great man in the law courts for libel. To all appearance, it was an act of insane pique. Ruskin had the whole authority of those who counted in the world of English art to back his own. It was not likely that a London jury would appreciate the merits of a

nocturne in black and gold more keenly than the author of *Modern Painters*. And the expense, even of a successful action, would be ruinous to Whistler.

But no one was more capable of appreciating the ultimate effects of a master-stroke of publicity. His opponent was prevented, by ill health, from appearing in person, but his cause was supported by a formidable company of witnesses, including Frith and Burne-Jones, and the Attorney-General had been briefed on his behalf. So much the better for Whistler's purpose.

The great lawyer, completely out of his depth, tried to cross-examine Whistler on the subject of his paintings. The artist, with deadly courtesy, succeeded not only in repulsing but annihilating him.

"The labour of two days, then, is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?"

"No," came the reply, "I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime."

After this it was merely slaying a corpse when, in reply to,

"Do you think now that you could make *me* see the beauty of that picture?"

Whistler, after gravely scrutinizing first the picture and then the devoted Philistine before him, drawled out his verdict:

"No! Do you know it would be as hopeless as for the musician to pour his notes into the ears of a deaf man."

That cross-examination had achieved Whistler's purpose. After that it did not matter that the jury awarded the contemptuous verdict of a farthing damages—Whistler flaunted the farthing on his watch-chain. It did not even matter that as the result of the proceedings he was declared bankrupt. He dominated his assembled creditors with as easy a grace as he had disposed of the Attorney-General, and then he went to Venice, and began to retrieve

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his fortunes with a series of matchless etchings. He was now the most-talked-of artist in England, and he saw to it that people were kept talking. The time was to come when no critic would dare accord him anything but the honours of a Master.

An even more important result of the trial was that the authority of John Ruskin, and all that he stood for, was shattered beyond recovery. Henceforth it was the gospel of James, and not that of John, that was in the ascendant. The idea of art as something apart from, and even in opposition to, the tendencies of modern civilization, was steadily gaining ground. But it might prove that by cutting itself loose from art, as well as religion, civilization was in danger of losing its own soul.

CHAPTER VI
SCIENCE AS RELIGION

To deny that every day and in every way material civilization was getting better and better, or at any rate fatter and fatter, would hardly have occurred to any ordinary person in the seventies. And yet—was everything so well as it seemed? What of the foundations? What of the informing spirit? It was disquieting that art should be showing a tendency to withdraw itself from life. But the majority of practical men probably thought, if they did not say, that life could get on well enough, at a pinch, without art. It was more disquieting that the certainties of religion should be called in question. But there was at least one rock upon which sensible men could build, and that rock was science.

It was, after all, science that had made modern progress what it was. Science—to use a phrase entirely appropriate in a commercial age—delivered the goods. She increased, visibly, measurably, and continuously, man's powers over the dead matter and blind energy of his environment. There was no nonsense about science. She did not draw cheques to be cashed post-mortem by the Bank of Heaven. She did not prescribe forms of prayer to attract depressions or break up anti-cyclones. She was the good fairy, whose gifts, in one brief century, had revolutionized human life. In an age of universal questioning her truth stood above question, her laws held good throughout the whole of infinite space.

Since the publication of that epoch-making book, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, science had displayed every

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sign of becoming not only a mode of knowledge, but a religion—the way, the truth and the life of the future. The attempt of the fundamentalist hierarchy to dictate to seekers after truth what precise sort of truth they were or were not to find, was followed by a counter-offensive of the triumphant scientists. Free thought, by a strange freak of language, became the label attached to a counter-orthodoxy, it being understood that thought was only free when it happened to flow in rationalistic channels. It became the fashion to look upon religion and science as if they were two rival faiths in perpetual conflict, an Ormuz of dry light contending with an Ahriman of priestly darkness. On neither side was a spirit of sweet reasonableness much *en evidence*. I have heard an old Victorian clergyman, the kindest and best of men, confess that it was a pity he had never had the opportunity for one good running kick at Darwin. On the other side we have that austere Radical Mr. John Morley of Blackburn and the *Fortnightly Review*, carefully spelling God with a small “g”, in the principle, as Mr. Justice Stephen surmised, that every little helps. Swinburne—an incongruous cavalier figure amid the grim iron-sides who fought for the Unknowable—took advantage of the Œcumenical Council at Rome to shriek defiance at the priests and their God, and to sing,

“Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the maker of things!”

So far, the open conflict of science against religion was waged by an intelligentsia of latter-day Puritans. They were, in fact, more consistent Puritans than those of the Reformation, who had but exchanged the authority of Holy Church for that of Holy Scripture, and who forsook Leo of Rome to cling the closer to Jesus of Nazareth. But though they rejected the Victorian God, they had more than their share of Victorian respectability. Nothing would induce any

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of them to admit to so shameful a designation as that of atheist. Huxley, in 1869, coined the convenient term Agnostic. "The difference between an agnostic and an atheist", as Professor Bury, a later freethinker, put it, "is that the atheist positively denies the existence of a personal God, the agnostic does not believe in it."¹ Which, of course, made all the difference in the world, or, at any rate, in that part of the world that owned Victoria as Queen.

There is a curious similarity in the appearance of these Victorian Rationalists. The forehead is usually of noble proportions in striking contrast with the lower part of the face, whose pinched appearance, especially when accentuated by whiskers, suggests that the emotional development has been sacrificed to that of the intellect. But a glance is enough to convince the most prejudiced beholder that the freedom of these men stopped short at thought, and did not extend to their righteous and sober, if not—in the formal sense—godly lives. They were, in fact, thoroughly worthy specimens of the middle-class Englishman.

A state of conflict between religion and science is equally injurious for both. It brought the representatives of science out of the study and laboratory into the market-place; it taught them the arts of the rhetorician and journalist. Charles Darwin, one of the truest men of science that ever lived, refused to have part or lot in these controversies, and deplored that they should have troubled the peaceful world of science. But Huxley—great biologist though he was—was also a born fighter, and joyously assumed the office of Darwin's bulldog. The bulldog is a noble animal—but hardly of the kind best fitted to typify the scientific temperament. Tyndall, Clifford, and other Rationalists, were not behindhand in militancy. The result of conflict was inevitably to create a dogma

¹ *A History of Freedom of Thought*, p. 214.

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that became more and more uncompromising for purposes of propaganda, and finally become simple enough to be proclaimed from soap-boxes in Hyde Park.

The effect was bad on the scientists themselves, for the atmosphere of conflict is fatal to that serene detachment of view, that perfect readiness to follow the truth wherever she leads, which is the first thing needful for the scientist. Its effect was almost equally bad upon the man in the street, for it made him see the achievement and aims of science in an utterly false perspective.

To this man in the street, the controversy about evolution assumed a wholly disproportionate importance. It was like Free Trade or Parliamentary Reform—something easy to understand and with a strong emotional appeal. Mr. Darwin had said that men were descended from monkeys—in one book of the time, by a heavily sarcastic clergyman, we have a picture of one of these supposed ancestors, with the body of a monkey and the head and beard of a typical man of the seventies. One hand, or paw, grasps a bottle—presumably of strong liquor. Darwin had not only insulted God by taking the job of creation off His hands, but also Man, by giving him an indefinitely great-grandfather called Jacko, which may explain, if it does not justify, the desire of the good man, to whom I have already referred, for a running kick at Darwin.

This booming and pillorying of Darwin shows a complete misunderstanding of that great man's achievement. From a scientific point of view, the origin of *homo sapiens* is a side issue of no special importance. What Darwin had accomplished was a veritable revolution in the science of biology. Owing to his patient research and brilliant generalization, the classification of species had been placed on a new, evolutionary basis—no biologist who followed him,

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whether he chose to call himself rationalist or fundamentalist, could build on any other foundations than those which Darwin had so well and truly laid.

The rumpus about Moses and monkeys had given the layman not only a distorted, but a partial view of scientific progress. Biology happened to be in the limelight, because it was possible to get an emotional kick out of it. But few people bothered about the equally important work that was being done in other fields of research, because abstruse and symbolically expressed calculations make poor reading. The day of the humble inventor, with little book-learning, but with a knowledge of machinery derived from practical experience of its handling, was waning to its close. The problems that now called for solution were those not of the workshop but the study. For every score of men who took sides for or against Darwin, scarcely one knew or cared about the wonderful work that was being done by men like Thomson (afterwards Lord Kelvin) and Clerk Maxwell in increasing Man's knowledge and control of the blind forces of nature. Even when life was enriched by such gifts as the submarine cable, the telephone, and the electric light, few of the beneficiaries had the least idea of the men and labour to which they were indebted. But the last thing these labourers would have wished was to emerge into the limelight. The conflict between religion and science might be waged in the field of biology—its echoes hardly penetrated to those of physical and mathematical science. Clerk Maxwell might elaborate Faraday's intuitions into formulæ—he would never have dreamed of being Faraday's, or anyone else's, bulldog.

Meanwhile science was continuously effecting the transformation of life. It might be a question whether Man was being more or less affected by art as the years went by, but there could be no question that Man was every year becoming a more scientific

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animal, or, at any rate, more dependent on the results of science. If we could put ourselves back even to mid-Victorian times, we should find daily life surprisingly crude and primitive, even among the rich and comfortable classes. This was especially the case in the now all-important matter of hygiene. The big bath was still a rare and sometimes a dangerous institution. It would probably be a large and luxurious addition to somebody's bedroom, into which the water oozed in some mysterious way from below. It drained off into the pipe from the nearest water closet, which was not invariably provided with a trap. What sweet influences percolated from the depths may be better imagined than described. I know of one instance where the occupant of such a room was in a state of chronic ill-health until the cause was at long last ascertained. It is not surprising that the cause of a good many deaths was summed up in the expressive word "drains".

In the same house, the drawing-room became inexplicably and intolerably noisesome whenever the wind happened to be in a certain quarter. This was eventually found to be due to the fact that the "stink pipe" ran up the chimney stack, and that its effluvia were, under certain conditions, actually drawn down into the room.

Fresh air, particularly during the night, was a source of terror, and heroic efforts were made to keep it from human lungs. In the excellent series of household manuals to which I have already referred, the volume on the bedroom is written by one who proclaims herself to be an enthusiast for fresh air, but even she countenances the nocturnal sealing up of children, old people, and invalids. One bold device of hers for admitting air into the room, is that of boring a few holes with an awl into the door! Every sort of contrivance was in use for keeping any breath of untainted air from filtering between window-sashes, beneath

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doors, or down chimneys, and for producing a morning frowst of Herculean potency.

If this was so even in the stately homes of England, how much worse must have been the conditions in which the poor had to pig it together ! I would quote, as one typical instance, that of the parish of Snodland, in Kent, where, in 1865, a dreadful epidemic of typhus had broken out. And no wonder, if we may trust the description of the parish priest, who appears, in this instance, to have been the most enlightened member of the community ! “ Men ”, he says, “ build houses without wells and without drains ; with open cesspools and with open drains ; with the drains of one block of houses running under the open sinks of another block of houses, and sending their vapours through them ; with closets in closest possible proximity to the houses, crowded and not cleaned for eighteen months at a time.”¹

And yet, next year, the local Board of Guardians rejected by one vote the proposition to appoint a sanitary inspector. For, as their chairman sapiently informed them, “ there is no proof that disease is connected with stinks and smells. The London night men and cesspool cleaners are a very healthy race ; their employment agrees with them. Again the cattle plague has not spared Lord Sydney and Lord Granville, where every precaution has doubtless been used, and I do not believe that the cholera would be kept off by any similar precautions.”

But progress in such things was continuous, if not always rapid. The scientific spirit of the time had spread even to the politicians—Disraeli invented the slogan *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas*, and his Secretary, Assheton Cross, made a notable attempt to translate it into practice, particularly by his Artisans' Dwellings Act of 1875, which gave the opportunity for Joseph Chamberlain, as Mayor of Birmingham, to

¹ *Maidstone Journal*, 30th November 1865.

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show what could be done by enlightened administration to transform Cobbett's "wens" into well-ordered and healthy cities in which men could have scope for living well.

Human life was being made progressively longer and safer, not only by public action, but by the giant strides that were being made in the healing art, and particularly by Lister's development of antiseptic surgery. The status of the doctor was greatly improved during Victoria's reign; he was no longer in danger of having it confounded with that of the old apothecary—which, by the way, had been the last word on the lips of the mortally stricken Wellington. But as late as the eighties occurred the trial of a certain Kentish rector, who, in addition to his ordinary duties to his flock, was in the habit of performing those of an unlicensed and unpaid general practitioner, and who finally succeeded, not by exhortation but prescription, in inducing one of them to join the angels. At the subsequent trial a sympathetic jury acquitted him, which was perhaps fortunate, as Mr. Justice Day made no secret of the severe line he would have been prepared to take.

Signs were already apparent that the discoveries of Faraday, and the work of Maxwell, Thomson, Herz, and others, in exploring the electro-magnetic field, were beginning to bear fruit. The Steam Age was beginning to merge into that of electricity. The telephone was invented in 1876, and in 1878 there was something like an incipient panic among the holders of gas shares, on account of the arrival of the electric light. This discovery seems to have created quite a sensation—to judge from the way it is exploited in *Punch*—though, as a matter of fact, it was quite a score of years before it made its way into anything like general use. At any rate it could still, in the middle of the nineties, account for the climax of the following description, in a school-boy's attempt at a novel, of

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"a room vieing with, nay, surpassing in splendour, the most magnificent chamber in any palace in the world. Nothing met the eye but the glitter of gold and sparkle of diamonds, the costliest hangings, the loveliest tapestry, the most exquisitely panelled ceiling, and"—the author having evidently reserved the choicest item in this feast of typically ninetyish taste for the last—"the whole was lit by a magnificent electric light."¹

"Others abide our question, thou art free,"

might, during the second half of Victoria's reign, have been spoken not of Shakespeare, but of science. She, at least, might claim to be making the world every day and in every way better and better. She affected life in manifold and often unsuspected ways, ever more and more intimately, and always she was the kind fairy, the miracle-working genie at his master's beck and call. It is true that some of the old ecclesiastical guard kept up a rear-guard action against her advance. There were husbands and even doctors who drew the line against making things too easy for woman in labour—a merciful Lord being supposed to have a sort of vested interest in their screams, and one remembers hearing old-fashioned people talking of the impious presumption of those who imagined they could defeat their Maker's plain intention by enabling men to fly like birds. But "the great social forces" of Gladstonian rhetoric were more and more obviously—except to Gladstone and a few fellow reactionaries—on the side of the scientists. The age was becoming more and more consciously scientific, and in fact, as Samuel Butler noted down, science was becoming daily more and more personified and defied. The time, he surmised, would come when it would be said that science had sent down his only begotten

¹ Abstracted, by kind permission of the author, from *I Never Sleep*, a hitherto unpublished romance.

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son, Darwin or Huxley, that those who believe in him, etc.

This new religion of science was fast acquiring a body of dogmatic belief, though its apostles—not being skilled in such matters—never succeeded in boiling it down to a creed. Nothing was God—everything was that new, blessed word evolution. The universe was a common-sense and plain-sailing affair to those who refrained from pushing inquiry too far into ultimate truths. Space was emptiness that went on for ever. Time likewise went on, and had gone on, for ever. Within these ample confines the game of evolution was played, with a few very simple materials. You had matter made up of little, hard, indivisible pills called atoms, of some four-score-and-ten assorted kinds and weights. You had energy, with a strange property of always dissipating itself in space, so that the universe was busily engaged, and presumably always had been, in burning itself out. There was gravitation, which gave every atom a tiny but measurable pull on every other atom. Why, was not very clear, except that you had got to get the concern started somehow. Then life turned up at the appropriate moment, and though no scientist had so far succeeded in getting life into dead matter—except with the aid of an unsterilized receptacle—there was no doubt, among the faithful, that the feat had accomplished itself somehow in Archæan times, and that the ways and means of the transition would sooner or later be revealed. The rest was just a matter of trust in Darwin and belief in the power of future scientists to clear up whatever was as yet unexplained in the theory.

If space, time, gravitation, life, energy, and all the different kinds of atoms had ever done anything so irregular as to sing together, that song would most appropriately have been the war-time chorus of :

We're here, because we're here, because
We're here, because we're here !

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A nonsense universe, this, if we are to think in terms of ultimate or absolute truth, but a very convenient and perhaps necessary provisional sketch of the universe, in the existing state of knowledge. Scientists are quite right to work on the basis of the facts they have discovered, and not those that they believe may be discovered some day. And if the facts, up to date, do not provide a basis for a coherent or self-explanatory universe, the scientists must put up with the best makeshift they can get, just as primitive astronomers conducted their researches in a universe with the sun in the middle, or the first geographers found out as much as they could about a flat earth. The only danger about the method is when the makeshift gets taken a little too seriously, and, consciously or subconsciously, the nonsense hardens into a dogma, which, unless a man accepts whole and undefiled, he cannot be sane. For scientific fiction, through an indispensable servant, is of all masters the most tyrannous.

All would have been well, if the scientists had accepted the full implications of Huxley's new word "Agnostic", and confessed, like Newton, that they were but as children gathering pebbles on the shore of a boundless ocean of knowledge. But what the agnosticism of the *fin de siècle* amounted to in practice, was more like the faith supposed to be that of Dr. Jowett :

"Whatever there is to know I know it,
And what I don't know isn't knowledge."

But the first lesson of evolution surely ought to have been how very dangerous it is for any generation to take its speculations on ultimate truth too seriously.

The deification of science prevented its worshippers from perceiving how perilously lopsided it had become. In all that concerned the knowledge and control of the outer world, its advance had been

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sensational beyond precedent. In what concerned the knowledge and control of Man himself, there had been scarcely the semblance of progress. Indeed, the tendency was to reduce thought and personality to a mere specialized function of matter, and to treat Man as if he were no more than a specially complicated piece of machinery, with his thoughts and actions as rigidly predetermined as the course of a planet. The psychology of time was, for the most part, an indigestible re-hash of dead Panjandrum; sociology was the new fancy word for a long-winded paraphrase of each sociologist's individual or class prejudices. Science was, in fact, too busy transforming Man's environment to have any serious thought of adapting Man to that transformation. In fact, she hardly recognized his existence, except as a not specially significant part of his own environment. But if there was anything to be learnt from evolution at all, it was that a species which, for any reason, fails to adapt itself to environment, dies. Which would appear to mean that science was very swiftly and effectively arranging for the extinction of the human species. Not that anybody, in that time of prosperity and progress, would have regarded such a statement as anything but a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Science was lopsided in another way. So convinced were its adherents of the all-sufficiency of their provisional universe, that they were almost incapable of receiving any facts or evidence that were plainly incapable of fitting into it. In 1868, for example, three eminently trustworthy witnesses, two of them peers, testified to having seen Mr. D. D. Home float out of one window, 70 feet above the street, and in at another. The feat was actually repeated, and the incident is as well testified to as anything can conceivably be. Again Professor Crookes, one of the greatest scientists of the day, conducted a number of experiments with a strange being calling itself Katie

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King, that appeared capable of materializing under certain conditions, and of whose genuineness the Professor convinced himself by the most searching tests. But these and a multitude of similar phenomena were either denied with contumely, or simply ignored. The open mind, supposed to be characteristic of the scientist, was almost invariably banged, barred and bolted in the face of such evidence. The rationalist entered a séance-room not to inquire but to expose, thus doing his bit for the inviolability of the neat and intelligible universe in which he chose to live. And, of course, there was plenty to expose, because these new phenomena, with which orthodox science refused to concern itself, became the special preserve of the fraud and charlatan, on the one hand, and, on the other, of uncritical enthusiasts, pathetically intent on the one object of reopening communication with their beloved dead, and as ready to be convinced of their existence as old Lady Tichborne of the identity of the Claimant with her lost son. Had the problem been approached with an honest determination to sift the true from the false and to follow the truth wherever it might have led, the conclusion might have emerged, not, perhaps, that the claims of the spiritualists were to be accepted at their face value, but that the universe was a far less simple affair than a mere working hypothesis would lead one to suppose, and that science, even towards the close of the nineteenth century, might be only scratching at the surface of reality.

We come back to the question—were the effects and tendencies of nineteenth-century science so unquestionably beneficent as almost everyone at the time assumed them to be? Merely to have asked such a question in the seventies would have been to invite doubts on one's seriousness or sanity—unless, indeed, one was championing the cause of that invincibly reactionary Potentate usually referred to as the Lord.

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And yet, in 1872, there had been published a brilliantly witty satire on modern life, bearing the title of *Erewhon*, or Nowhere, and written by the Samuel Butler whom we have already met as a blasphemer of scientific orthodoxy, but whom no one had ever accused of serving the Lord. This "Enfant Terrible of Literature" argued, through the mouth of an Erewhonian professor, the possibility that mankind would eventually sink into a state of contented but abject slavery to its machines. But then no one took Erewhonian professors, or even Butler himself, very seriously.

There were—as we have already hinted—more ominous possibilities still. Did it really go without saying that mankind was capable of controlling the vast powers of which it had suddenly possessed itself? A distribution of Rolls-Royces to infants or bombs to the inmates of an asylum would not necessarily be attended with pleasant consequences.

CHAPTER VII

ORTHODOXY IN RETREAT

When the key-positions of Christianity were being assailed with ever-increasing violence, one might have expected that its adherents would have drawn together in defence of the common cause. But so little did the realities of the outer world penetrate to those courts in which one day was better than a thousand, that reverend gentlemen—once they had recovered from the first shock of Darwinism—were more excited about their own sectarian differences than concerned about the prospect of finding themselves like the frogs and mice in the fable, with the Agnostics in the part of the owls.

To the ecclesiastical specialist, squabbles about the precise circumstances in which it is lawful to burn tallow, and the right of the congregation to see what their priest is doing with his hands, are of momentous interest. What the Carpenter of Nazareth would have thought of them is another matter. It is, anyhow, largely with such squabbles that the ecclesiastical history of this time is taken up.

The great days and enthusiasms of the Oxford Movement were over, and the battle of High and Low had resolved itself into something resembling the stale-mate of trench warfare, enlivened by perpetual raids. Low had had a distinct advantage in the large-scale operations that had ended with the secession of first Newman and then Manning to Rome, but it was evident that all the massed forces of Protestantism would not be able to drive High from the field. Despite hair-raising warnings of a

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new Popish plot, of pitiful prisoners in convents, of wives and daughters corrupted wholesale by Don Juans in strange vestments, despite also the ridicule and contempt with which Ritualistic practices were assailed in the most influential section of the press, the Ritualists not only remained firmly entrenched in their parishes, but actually began to gain ground. It soon became apparent that in a body like the Church of England, with its tangle of prescriptive rights and its intense parochial individualism, it was perfectly impossible to enforce any centralized discipline over a few determined sectarians, with a *flair* for litigation, and martyrdom as a trump card to be played when litigation went the wrong way.

The comic muse of Gilbert and Sullivan was prohibited from treading on holy ground, otherwise they might have composed an even funnier sequel to *Trial by Jury*, founded on some of the actual cases in the course of which grave divines vindicated their Christian liberties. One of the points to be thrashed out would have been the right of a clergyman to brighten up his service by the use of a stuffed dove. There was Father Arthur Tooth, who having successfully forced the secular arm to put him into jail, and having been ejected thence at the urgent request of his ecclesiastical opponents, got back into the church, out of which he had been locked, by the window, conducted a forbidden service, and subsequently, by an absurd technical quibble, turned the tables on the judge who had originally committed him for contempt, and had the whole proceedings against him declared null and void.¹ And only Gilbert could have done justice to the clergyman who refused to administer the Sacrament to a member of his flock, unless he would sit down and write a "calm letter" stating his belief—which, by the way, he had never denied—in the Devil.²

¹ *A History of Modern England*, by H. Paul, Vol. IV, pp. 353-4.

² *Ib.*, Vol. III, pp. 422-3.

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Only two or three clergymen actually succeeded in attaining jail; the mere threat of such a scandal was enough to blunt the edge of coercion. The spirit of uncompromising realism, that was gradually ousting the old Liberal idealism from every department of civilized life, was particularly *en evidence* among the Ritualists—there was, indeed, some resemblance between their tactics, and those of Parnell's militant nationalism. The essence of both was to seize every possible advantage and exploit it by any means. These tactics, when employed by the Ritualist clergy, if not very obviously Christian, were at least justified by success. Every attempt to enforce Protestant standards broke down hopelessly. Even when a Bill was passed, in 1874, with the express object of putting down Ritualistic practices, it merely succeeded in multiplying lawsuits, without achieving any part of its object.

But we shall be doing less than justice to the ministers of Christianity, if we fix our attention only on the militant side of their activities. An ecclesiastic is after all a practical worker, who is only incidentally concerned with theory. He has as hard a daily job as most men, and it is by the way he gets through that job that his value to society will be determined. Had the Ritualists been merely concerned with litigation and controversy, they would never have succeeded, as they eventually did, in becoming the most powerful party in the Church. But they devoted more attention to the technique of their calling than their opponents, and they were masters of a considerably more scientific practical psychology. They were equally successful in satisfying the emotional requirements of rich and fashionable congregations, like that of All Saints', Clifton, and not only the emotional, but also the bodily needs, of desperately poor parishes like St. Peter's, London Docks, whose vicar was the Reverend Charles Fuge Lowder.

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This gentleman's services were an occasion of peculiar scandal to his Evangelical opponents, who brawled and blasphemed with such pious zeal that the Bishop had, at one time, to order the church to be closed. But then the cholera came to the parish, and such was Father Lowder's work that from that time forth the docker congregation furnished a sufficiently rough house to keep the hottest gospeller quiet during service time.

It was from such shining examples of Christian service that the High Church derived the strength that enabled it to survive the prejudice, now of three centuries' standing, against anything that savoured of "Popery". The headquarters of Ritualism was at St. Alban's, Holborn, where the service was described by Lord Shaftesbury as resembling that of Jupiter and Juno, and whose officiating priest was a Mr. Mackonochie, whose life was one long series of litigations. But among the curates was Father Stanton, one of those men who seem born to attract love, and who added to the gifts of a social worker the spiritual force of a saint. Fathers Lowder and Stanton were but outstanding examples of a type of which the ascetic discipline of the extreme High Church was prolific. There was also another type of Ritualist whose standpoint—or temperament—was less that of the saint than of the technician, and whose austere zest in the sectarian game was uninformed by any fire of spiritual enthusiasm or warmth of charity. Such a man was often worth his weight in gold when it was a question of skilled team work, but he afforded whatever justification existed for the Protestant caricature of the tight-lipped and unctimonious¹ Machiavellian who was plotting to wean the country from the simple Evangelical faith of Christ crucified.

¹ A word, I believe, for which the English language is indebted to Father Ronald Knox.

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This faith was by no means a spent force, even as late as the seventies. The technique of salvation by violent doses of spiritual excitement was carried a step further by Messrs. Sankey and Moody, who were pioneers of that intensive mass suggestion that was destined to such prodigious exploitation in their native America. Even more remarkable was that severely disciplined and sternly Evangelical organization founded by William Booth to wage war on the Devil, and christened, in 1880, the Salvation Army.

We have to distinguish between two aspects of organized Christianity. For the intellectual and spiritual problems of the time, it was becoming more and more palpably incompetent to provide a solution. Hardly one of the recognized leaders¹ of contemporary thought could by the remotest stretch of imagination have been described as a hundred-per-cent Christian of any recognized denomination. The rival sects furiously raged together in a dream world of their own, with which enlightened thinkers did not concern themselves. But the Churches, like frogs, displayed a wonderful capacity of normal functioning after the greater part of their brains had been scooped out. The clergy were incomparably more efficient workers than a hundred, or even fifty years before. The success of "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce and other reforming bishops in organizing their dioceses had set up a new and higher standard of clerical duty. The old, port-drinking *bon viveurs*, who had, through family influence, been appointed to many a fat living as a means of drawing an easy income for a minimum of work, had almost died out. I doubt if any old gentleman alive to-day could truthfully parallel a confidence made to me by one in the dawn of this century—that the first time he

¹ Newman is, of course, the most conspicuous exception. Gladstone, as a thinker, is hardly to be taken seriously, still less Manning.

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had ever been the worse for liquor was when, on the way home after dining with the Vicar, he had gone to sleep in his pony cart and ended up, cart and all, in a ditch. The sectarian struggle for survival had at least one good effect—that neither side had any use for the Reverend amateur.

But no amount of zeal and conscientious parish work could compensate for what was becoming more and more plainly the intellectual bankruptcy of the Churches. The vital need of the age was for a new spiritual orientation, an adaptation of the human spirit to the revolutionized circumstances of a machine age. But the seeker for truth was either commanded to put his intellect into fetters and be as happy as he could with emotional dope, or else to accept the literal infallibility of a criticism-riddled Bible and a myth of divine vindictiveness and vicarious sacrifice that ran directly counter to all his notions of justice and credibility.

Was there no alternative between such reversion to the myths of an unscientific age, and an advance to the arid wastes of a Rationalism by which Man was reduced to a transitory and soulless automaton in that enormous, but equally transitory automatic accident called the universe? The austere and unemotional Puritans who championed their new religion of science found this prospect as much to their liking as the Esquimaux doubtless finds the prospect of his icy mountains, but to mortals of less stern composition, the idea of being deprived of God, free-will, and immortality without any compensation except that of more accurate text-books and bigger and better machines, was anything but exhilarating. A French professor, Auguste Comte, had tried, in his logical French way, to set up a religion of humanity that should retain all the emotional satisfactions of a superseded God-worship; but though this Positivism, as it was called, had its

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propagandists in England, including so notable a man of letters as Frederic Harrison, it never seemed able to come alive. It might be logical to substitute Our Humanity which art on Earth for Our Father which art in Heaven, but it did not somehow seem the real thing. You may turn on the tap of religious emotion, but unless there is some force to drive the water along the pipes, you will get nothing but a few chokes and gurgles—and the rest silence.

But to some less logical English minds, it did not seem altogether hopeless to make the best of both worlds, and to retain some sort of a God, who might fit in equally well with the Christian and the Agnostic scheme of things. A divine Candidate for the post had been in existence for quite a century and a half, though His claims, during the nineteenth century, had been overshadowed by those of that celestial King Stork, whom pious Evangelicals feared as the Lord. His affable and discreet rival with whom even Voltaire had been on bowing terms, I ventured in *The Victorian Tragedy*¹ to designate as the Deity. This God, or Power, or Principle, indulged in none of the violent and wrathful activities of the Lord. He was content to let the Universe run itself, so far as it was able. Only, in order that it might run smoothly and in the right direction, He imparted to it just the necessary minimum of tilt or bias. His business was to make everything work out right in the long run—rather like a dramatist who lets his characters develop freely on their own lines, but guides them all the time to a happy ending.

It was just there that the danger of the Deity cult lay. He could be relied upon by Man to do what it was Man's supreme duty to do for himself. The necessity for a spiritual revolution to match the revolution in Man's outward circumstances could be safely burked, because "somehow", as Tennyson

¹ In the U.S.A., *Those Earnest Victorians*.

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expressed it, "good will be the final goal of ill". The ship may be drifting towards the rocks, but the Captain is somewhere up above, and may be trusted to get her safely somehow to some sort of a port. That is what Tennyson would have called faintly trusting the larger hope.

The prestige of the Lord had been more and more discredited ever since His unfortunate encounter with Darwin, and it was almost inevitable under the circumstances that some attempt should be made to resuscitate the Deity. Indeed He hardly needed resuscitating, for some of the greatest Victorians might have been claimed as His devotees—Tennyson, for instance, Ruskin, and perhaps Browning. Carlyle was essentially a Deity-worshipper, only his Calvinist upbringing had the effect of imparting to his Power or Principle informing the Universe some of the most unaimable qualities of the Lord.

Evolution naturally offered great opportunities for a Deity to guide or supervise the process—and even to bridge over awkward gaps. Mr. Bernard Shaw actually succeeded in making his Deity create or evolve Himself out of nothing.

During the seventies the most ambitious attempt to bring the Deity abreast of the time was that of Matthew Arnold, who had little if any interest in the evolution controversy. Arnold was the son of an intensely moralizing clerical head master, and though he conceived it his life's mission to be an apostle of culture, he was perfectly incapable of regarding art or literature from any other standpoint than that of a very earnest pedagogue conducting the Sunday morning service in the School chapel. Shelley's genius is waved away in a sentence; his peccadilloes occupy a whole essay. Keats is summoned to the head master's study, where his letters to Miss Brawne are opened and read . . . most distressing . . . and such a promising boy! Byron

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too, brilliant—granted—but slovenly ; it is more in sorrow than in anger that we have to write on his report, “ Could not manage himself, could not guide his ways aright . . . was all astray . . . no light . . . did not see the slow and laborious way upward . . . had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue . . . ” one cannot rub such lessons in too hard !

It was not enough for Arnold to be a pedagogue. The Muse herself had got to put on cap and gown, and take her mission seriously. Poetry—presumably *without* a hey and a ho and a hey nonny no—was defined as a criticism of life. Whether or not that was the Muse’s attitude towards life, it was certainly Arnold’s. He was perpetually criticizing, but he seemed powerless to construct. He was best when he was dwelling with a malicious suavity, not wholly unlike that of a “ catty ” woman, on the foibles and crudities of the British Philistine. Culture was the remedy he had to offer, but when you come to inquire in what culture consisted, it did not appear to amount to anything more definite than just being cultured.

It was inevitable that with his clerical-pedagogical bias, Arnold should have applied himself to the reform of religion ; it was no less inevitable that he should have had resource to a God so eminently in harmony with his own temperament as the urbane and rather indefinite Deity. So earnest a censor of morals would naturally want his Deity to resemble himself as much as possible. Accordingly Arnold’s God is defined as a power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. In other words, He is somebody or something, according to choice, that gives the human heart an imperceptible but sufficient tilt in the right direction. How He, or It, goes about this useful task is nowhere very clearly indicated.

Under these auspices it is quite possible, Arnold

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thinks, to combine Christianity with culture. The supernatural element—that is to say, anything inconsistent with the view of nature fashionable among Victorian scientists—is discreetly barred by Arnold's own dogma that miracles do not happen. And Christ, if not exactly a Saviour, was a very sweet and reasonable young man. If you only look at it in the right way, you can get all that any cultured person can expect from religion, by scrapping the substance and retaining the form. It is all a question of striking the correct emotional attitudes.

There was another Oxonian who went even further than Arnold in reducing religion to emotional dope. This was Walter Pater, who, far from presenting the exquisite figure in real life that his readers must have visualized, was a retiring and conventional don, with the appearance and moustache of a heavy dragoon. It was as early as 1868 that he had exhorted his disciples to burn with a hard, gem-like flame, and to get as many and as keen pulsations as possible out of the brief time that we have to exist. It was a flame that burnt not only hard, but froze. No writer with such æsthetic sensibilities was ever so devoid of human passion.

Pater was, at heart, just as much of a preacher, just as much of a pedagogue, as Arnold. He had none of the moral indifference that one associates with the cult of art for art's sake. Nobody but a don would have thought of suppressing, in a second edition, the conclusion of a book on *The Renaissance*—and the most significant part of that book—on the ground that "I conceived it might possibly mislead some of the young men into whose hands it might fall". Walter Pater had come with a grave sense of responsibility to proclaim a gospel, a message of salvation. He looked on art, literature, and—for the matter of that—religion, as "a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world". Such

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a refuge, in fact, as a bachelor don's rooms, spotlessly neat, with blue china on the mantelpiece, and an outlook across the peaceful quad on to the grey walls of the chapel.

Pater, possibly because he was less human, realized more clearly than Arnold what precise use he had for the Christian religion. Not only his rooms, but the chapel opposite, afforded a refuge, a cloistral refuge, from "a certain vulgarity". The most complete exposition of his New Epicureanism, as he called his gospel, took the form of a novel, one of the few of the world's great novels that succeeds in practically ignoring the fact of sex. This was the life story of a rich young Roman, called Marius, who spends the whole of his brief life in a hunt for exquisite, and exquisitely refined sensations. He ends by joining the Christians, not because he has any particular belief in their doctrines, but because he finds that he is able to obtain a choicer brand of emotional stimulant, a securer refuge from "a certain vulgarity", in the communion of saints, than from his previous experiments in paganism.

Pater, and even Arnold, were only able to influence a comparatively small audience of intellectuals. But their attitude is none the less of significance. For what the intellectual accepts to-day, will have percolated to-morrow to the minds of Tom, Dick and Harry, and reappear, duly vulgarized, as the faith of the market-place. In the seventies, outside the Churches themselves, there is apparent a conviction, fast approximating to unanimity among men of light and leading, that the intellectual bottom has fallen out of what has hitherto passed for the Christian religion. Patronage like that of Arnold or Pater was even more damaging than the shrieking enmity of Swinburne, and the frontal assaults of Rationalists and Higher Critics. It would be better, one might have thought, for Christianity to be buried outright,

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than for it to be embalmed and enshrined in a glass case of culture ; better, too, for the Water of Life to be spilt on the ground than for its virtues to be proclaimed as a refined substitute for cocaine.

The most serious feature of the situation was the utter lack of spiritual leadership. It was hopeless to look to this from the clergy, whose minds were for the most part set upon the unrealities of sectarian controversy, and who were out of touch with the scientific and intellectual tendencies of the new age, whose problems they disposed of by refusing to recognize their existence. But those who were so busily engaged in demolishing the old certainties, had strangely little to offer in their place. It was one thing to destroy, it was quite another to create.

It had not yet dawned upon modern Man that his safe civilization might prove after all to be a City of Destruction, nor had he yet echoed the lamentable cry of Bunyan's man in rags—"What shall I do?" Had he done so, he would have obtained no very satisfactory answer from any lay or clerical guide who was likely to offer himself.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAIRY TALE OF EMPIRE

It is only fair to concede that the men of religion were not unique in shirking the task of social and spiritual reconstruction, and retiring to a world peopled by the figments of their imagination, wherein they could exhaust their energies in struggles that had no more relation to reality than the battles of the cricket field and prize-ring.

The same description would apply, though in a lesser degree, to the warfare of Conservative and Liberal whose main battleground was at Westminster. We say a lesser degree, because it is impossible for those who conduct the business of government ever to get quite out of touch with reality. An extra penny on the income tax—for they thought in pennies in those days, and not in sixpences and shillings—is what Artemus Ward would have called “a darned uncomfortable reality”, a thing that could hardly be said, with equal emphasis, about an extra candle on the Altar. But the politician is compelled by the nature of his calling to take his stand on issues that can be readily explained to the crowd on whose suffrages he depends, to rely on the quick emotional appeal, to discard subtlety and think in terms of slogans and headlines. This is not favourable to a policy framed in view of those underlying realities which the statesman, in his heart of hearts, may know to be vital. A philosopher with the arts of a cheap-jack may be a conceivable, he is certainly not a common figure.

To the average Englishman of the seventies, politics

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had all the fascination of a duel. Conservative versus Liberal meant Dizzy versus Gladstone. Those two great figures, so impressive in themselves and so dramatically contrasted, had come to dominate the scene. The rest, the Lowes, the Salisburys, the Forsters, the Northcotes, were pygmies by comparison. All the conscious integrity of the great middle class was summed up in Gladstone. A godly, righteous and sober Liberalism, with increasing trade and diminishing taxation, were what he had to offer. What Disraeli stood for in the public eye is somewhat harder to define. Certainly not for whatever fine, old, crusted Toryism might inform the numskulls of fox-hunters from Eton. Nothing had ever less resembled the Tory of popular imagination than that inscrutable and rather dandified figure. It was just this inscrutability that was the secret of Disraeli's fascination. The ordinary man did not feel that he understood him as he understood Gladstone. He was an "oriental mystery"—the phrase stuck to him. Even *Punch*, which had persisted in treating him, for a quarter of a century, as the Ikey Mo of anti-Semite fiction, was sufficiently impressed by the successful passage of his Reform Bill to transform him into a Sphinx, colossal, mysterious, and a little sinister. There was a suggestion of magic—it might even be of black magic. It made people a little afraid of him . . . the new electorate did not take to him all at once.

In sober fact, Disraeli was a simpler and more human creature than either his admirers or opponents suspected. Take away that sphinx-like mask, and you would have found the features of a Peter Pan. An incurable romantic, his career had been one long fairy-story, with himself as the hero, and all the wonderful dreams coming true, even to the climax of arriving at the Palace, and producing by his wizardry an imperial crown for the brows of the great Queen—"the Faery", he called her, for Peter Pan had not

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ceased to believe in fairies—and being told to kneel and rise, no longer the poor Jew boy, born in a library and sent forth into the great world to seek his fortune, but a Peer of Britain, with belt and ermine, the mighty statesman whom Queen-Empress and people united to honour, and who would live for ever in history as Beaconsfield.

It was make-believe, no doubt, but more healthy and attractive make-believe than that of ordinary politics. No wonder that Peter Pan threw himself into his part with the zest of perpetual boyhood, no wonder that he should have got himself up with the eyeglass and carnation buttonhole, the cynic smile, the grand manner, proper to his part in the fairy story! It was only the real Disraeli who never grew old or cynical, the child craving for affection, never satisfied with his success unless he had some understanding friend for audience. Not the least delightful part of his story is his attachment, in old age, to those two gracious ladies—one almost thinks of them as aunts—to whom he laid bare, day by day, all the secrets of his heart. One imagines that the keenest joy experienced in his hours of triumph arose from the thought of what a wonderful story this would be to tell Lady Bradford or Lady Chesterfield.

There was only one danger in all this—that the actor might get so absorbed in his part as to lose touch with mundane reality, to imagine that England was the realm of a real Faery Queen, Europe the Never-Never Land, and the Tsar, perhaps, Captain Hook. There might be playing at soldiers . . . women "cutting up what remains" on the slopes of Afghan passes, Zulus washing their assegais in the blood of lads from British villages—even if a catastrophe infinitely worse should just fail to materialize.

In 1874, England was in the mood for a new master. Under Gladstone's ministry, the country had enjoyed peace, prosperity, and reform, perhaps in too generous

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a measure for perfect contentment. The influence of boredom on the course of history has never been sufficiently allowed for. It was probably the cause of the dry rot that, more than the Goth and the mosquito, accounted for the fall of the Western Roman Empire. There sometimes comes on nations a mood like that which makes people rolling in wealth charter aeroplanes for ocean flights, when the chances are against their finishing alive. Safety is a dull blessing without romance, colour, stimulus, and it is an unfortunate trait of mankind that it seldom appreciates when it is well off. Disraeli's keen eye had marked the growing unpopularity of the Gladstonian team. In one of his most superb flights of oratory he compared the Treasury Bench to "one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous, there are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumbling of the sea."

There was something else than boredom that was undermining the ministry. It was prolific in reforms, but were they quite the sort of reforms that the new electorate was demanding? What the old, middle-class electorate had understood by reform was not what we should now call social, but political reform. Liberalism meant freedom, the freedom of everybody, in a capitalist society, to make the best use of whatever property he might have acquired or inherited. What it did not mean was any alteration of the distributive *status quo*, or the State taking over more than the necessary minimum of private property to be administered for the common benefit. The only considerable measure of social reform had been the Education Act, and about this Gladstone had been notoriously lukewarm.

The Liberal ministers, in fact, continued on their way regardless of the new masses of electors, who were

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beginning to watch their proceedings with ever-growing suspicion. And they were unfortunate enough to find themselves faced with the necessity of settling the status of Trades Unions. This they did on what appeared to them not only liberal but generous lines. They formally freed the Unions from the taint of illegality, made them lawful and registered corporations, with a right that they had not possessed before, to sue their own dishonest officials. It made them free—but with this one proviso, that they should not use their freedom as a means of restricting that of the humblest individual workman. The practice of picketing during strikes was so severely restricted—even black looks coming within the scope of the law—as to make a successful strike almost impossible. For a strike is a form of war, and efficient warfare is inconsistent with liberty. It is a hopeless task at the same time to be faithful to Liberal principles and to satisfy the ambitions—the legitimate ambitions, as most working-class electors believe—of trades unionism.

Disraeli, who was not hampered by Liberal dogma, was ready to make social reform a plank of Tory policy, and the Liberals only harmed themselves by gibes at “a policy of sewage”. Still more important, he was ready to satisfy the unexpressed demand for colour and magnificence by conducting the elector, as it were, to the top of a high mountain, whence he could see displayed, for the first time, a limitless vista of Empire. All these lands and the glory thereof should be John Bull’s, if he would go to the poll and vote Conservative. Gladstone, on the other hand, had a bribe to offer that might well have ensured his success with the electorate of the First Reform Bill. The income tax had been reduced to threepence—he would take it off altogether. The electorate of the Second Reform Bill spurned the offer with contumely, and a Tory majority, overwhelming for those days, was

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returned for the first time since Peel's triumph thirty-three years before.

The fairy story had now reached the last chapter, in which the hero has attained the summit of power, and has only got to rule the kingdom in happiness and prosperity ever afterwards. It seemed as if this programme was likely to be realized, for Disraeli in power had lost none of the wizard touch of the Oriental mystagogue. His purchase for the country of the Suez Canal shares was an episode of romantic fiction imported into real life. It is the one incident of recent history that has made a thoroughly exciting film. The crowning of the Queen as Empress of India was a symbolic act that made even the unimaginative islanders see visions of holding the gorgeous East in fee, and dream dreams of an Empire on which the sun never set. That prospect was all suffused with the roseate hues of Disraeli's imagination; there was no element of sordidness, and if there was danger, it was of that thrilling kind that no good fairy story ever lacks.

The drama rose to a climax when conveniently remote war-clouds began to darken over the Near East. It had been the complaint against Gladstone that he had never properly asserted the interests of the country, that he had wanted to be a Christian out of Church—even to the extent of submitting to arbitration the claims of the United States to be reimbursed for the exploits of the British-built cruiser *Alabama*. Another thing that he had done was to allow Russia to start building a Black Sea Fleet, in spite of the fact that about the one thing England had got to show for the bloodshed and misery of the Crimean "victory" was an undertaking on her part not to do so. It is not very clear what Gladstone could have done, beyond saving his country's face by getting the Russian action sanctioned by an International Congress, but it was at least clear that Russia

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had done this thing and got away with it. The episode only served to confirm what amounted to a national—and incidentally a royal—obsession that Russia was in some special sense the enemy of England. Her expansion into Central Asia was watched with intense suspicion. Now that the Queen was Empress of India, any threat to that costly jewel in the Crown of England, as Disraeli had described it, was felt with peculiar sensitiveness.

If Russia was in a special sense *the* enemy of England, it appeared to follow that Turkey, England's old protégé of the Crimea, must be the friend. It was rather difficult to feel much friendship for the Turk, but distance lightened the task, and anyhow it was a matter of life and death to keep the Russians from getting into Constantinople, and to prevent the fleet that never ought to have existed—it included one ironclad that was round like the lid of a cask¹—to debouch through the Straits on to England's communications with India. There were many who would live to see the time when a British and Australasian army would spend itself in heroic but futile efforts to capture Constantinople for the Tsar, and to open the Straits for the egress of that self-same fleet. But in the fairy story the enemy was that softly padding Bruin who looks so sleek and formidable in the cartoons of Tenniel. Of that the Faery herself and her people were heartily convinced.

The friendly Turk, provoked by the revolt of Christian peoples his ancestors had enslaved centuries before, had started to assert his rights of conquest in a highly inconvenient fashion. Reports came through of horrible massacres, of torture and rape and hardly believable cruelties practised wholesale in Bulgarian villages. Two English canons—one of them the silver-tongued Liddon—journeying along the River Save, had the unusual sight of an impaled Bulgarian.

¹ She was called *Admiral Popoff*.

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The evidence of these and similar atrocities accumulated ; it became overwhelming. Gladstone, who had announced his intention of retiring from the political arena, made a dramatic return. With burning eloquence he sought to arouse the moral indignation of Christian England. " Murder ! " he cried, throwing a new meaning into the familiar lines,

" Murder most foul, as at the best it is,
But this most foul, strange and unnatural ! "

The country thrilled with horror, but the Premier remained blandly impassive. For him the Bulgarian atrocities hardly existed. His part was to defeat the Bear ; he could not change it at a moment's notice for that of crusader against the infidel. It would have been too much to expect a septuagenarian Peter Pan to step out of one fairy story into another.

And now the Bear was beginning to move. The Turk was too strong for his unaided Christians ; orthodox Serbia had joined the revolt, had been beaten almost to her knees, and not for the last time, Russia was unwilling to see her crushed. After months of negotiation, the grey legions with their Tsar crossed the Danube ; they thundered at the gates of the Balkans, and the Turk, who, for all his faults, was a born soldier, had at last a chance of appearing in a sympathetic rôle, as the little fellow defending himself against a giant. The eyes of all Europe were fixed upon besieged Plevna, where the heroic Osman Pasha thrice signally repulsed desperate assaults. At one time it seemed anybody's game—there was talk at Russian headquarters of a retreat behind the Danube, though the Tsar would have none of it. But at last numbers prevailed ; the old defender of Sevastopol starved out Plèvna ; the Turkish armies went to pieces, and the Russians were sweeping on to Constantinople.

It was the supreme hour for Disraeli, or Beacons-

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field, as he now was. The disturbing business of the Balkan atrocities was more or less forgotten ; he had one task—to keep the Christian out of Constantinople. It would be a supreme triumph of his wizardry if he could win this victory not by violence, but by a masterpiece of diplomatic finesse. He set the stage for a war—no stupid Crimean slogging match, but one of Napoleonic brilliance, with an Indian expeditionary force striking into Central Asia, another army co-operating from Alexandretta, a third standing firm behind the Chetaldja Lines, with the fleet in support, guarding Constantinople. All the world watched breathless as first one daring move, and then another, brought the two Powers nearer and nearer to the abyss. The Russians wanted to dictate a treaty—the Englishman in the street was not very clear what precise harm he stood to derive from it, but he was bawling lustily :

“ We’ve fought the Bear a thousand times before,
And they shan’t have Con-stan-ti-nople ! ”

and if the Bear got the treaty he wanted, he would, in a sort of way, be “ having ” Constantinople. The only person whose calm was unruffled, when everybody else was losing his head, was the Premier. His task was even more difficult than the world knew, for his Faery had become something more like a Fury, ingeminating fire and slaughter, and ready to resign her crown rather than make the least concession to her good brother Alexander. The pace was too keen for the Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby, who, with another Cabinet Minister, resigned office. But Beaconsfield continued to play his pieces on the board with the calculated brilliance of a Morphy. The fleet was ordered, first to Besika Bay, and then up the Narrows, with the plain of Troy on one side and the heights of Gallipoli on the other. India made a dramatic appearance in arms, when, by the orders

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of her Queen-Empress, a division of Sepoys disembarked at Malta.

And then, when it seemed that the breaking-point had come, the tension suddenly relaxed—the Bear had at least yielded to the extent of allowing the settlement with Turkey to be submitted to a European Conference. But the danger of war was only postponed, and the centre of interest shifted to Berlin, where Prince Bismarck, as great a master of the realistic as Beaconsfield of the romantic touch, was acting the part of host and mediator. The Chancellor was not proof against the Premier's fascination. "The Old Jew", he exclaimed, "is the man!" For Disraeli had come to Berlin to guide the drama to its dénouement. There was the moment of deadly tension, when Russia was holding out on the question of whether the Sultan should be allowed to have garrisons in Eastern Roumelia, and Beaconsfield was on the point of leaving the Congress—which would have meant war. But he and Bismarck were working hand in glove, and the Bear, growling, gave back a pace or two. At last the end crowned the work, and there came the hour of supreme triumph, when the Premier returned, amid the wild plaudits of a grateful and intensely relieved nation, bringing back to his Faery what by universal consent was peace with honour.

There was one personal touch that made the triumph complete. Like Sancho Panza, the Disraeli of thirty years ago had dreamed of acquiring an island—he had made some fantastic sheikh in one of his novels talk of England taking over Cyprus. He now, as a lover might toss a trinket into his mistress's lap, presented Cyprus to England, to be her share of spoils for which she had not fought, while the real victors went away almost empty. It was the sort of thing that only happens in fairy stories.

How did it appear to that iron realist at Berlin?

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It was a triumph, certainly, but hardly for England, or even—except in personal kudos—for her “old Jew”. The Congress had succeeded precisely because, and in the way that, Bismarck had intended it to succeed. Faced with the undying enmity of France, who, against Bismarck’s better judgment, had been robbed of two of her fairest provinces, it was his object to prevent her from obtaining allies, and therefore to secure the alliance of Russia and Austria, and at least the benevolent neutrality of England. There was only one flaw in this scheme—Russia and Austria were irreconcilably opposed in the Balkans; both coveted the lordship of those turbulent Christian communities which were now ripe for liberation from the Turk. It was unfortunate that there should be this rift in the Alliance of the Three Emperors, but if Germany had to take a side, it would be with her Teutonic kinsmen in Austria—and the less openly she could take it, the better. It would then be a matter for Bismarck’s skill to re-insure his country against the enmity of Russia.

It was, under these arduous circumstances, a veritable godsend that England should be ready to do Bismarck’s work for him, and tilt the Balkan balance in favour of Austria. The extraordinary result of Russia’s victory was that Austria calmly appropriated—though without as yet formally annexing them—a couple of Jugo-Slav provinces from Turkey, while Russia, by way of some compensation for her victory, was forced to seize upon a strip of territory from her hitherto loyal ally, Roumania. The liberation of the Balkan Christians, on national lines, was successfully defeated. Some of them were handed back to the tender rule of the Turk, and what was left of Bulgaria was deliberately weakened by partitioning her, against the will of her inhabitants, into two provinces. The whole settlement turned out to have been about the worst conceivable alike from the standpoint of Eng-

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land's interests and that of European peace. England had strengthened the hands of her future enemies, and weakened those of her future allies. She had sown seeds of war in every part of the Balkans. She had compromised her honour by bolstering up the unspeakable Turk, who was to turn and stab her for her pains. And as for her new island, the only people who stood to profit from the arrangement were the Cypriotes themselves, who were destined to show their appreciation of her rule by burning down the residence of a British Governor-General.

Those who are versed in fairy-lore tell of glittering hoards which the Little People bestow on favoured mortals. This wealth has a disconcerting way of vanishing into thin air during the night. It was a magnificent gift of fairy gold that the old Jew had brought back to England.

It would have been well for him had his life ended with the last chapter of his fairy story, and he had been spared three years of sordid and bleak anticlimax. It was as if, after his return from Berlin, the magic wand that he had wielded with such careless ease had been broken. Peter Pan had grown up at last into a tired old man, who had lost the secret of success.

Everything went wrong. So far from accepting his rebuff, the Bear had been provoked into a malignant enmity that outlasted the century. Bulkied of her European ambitions, Russia began to push south-eastward, ever nearer to the Himalayan gates of India. The frontier state of Afghanistan was threatened; a Russian mission was received at Kabul and a British mission turned back from the frontier. It was obviously a case for the same sort of spirited policy as had brought about Peace with Honour, and the Premier had a Viceroy after his own heart, a romantic imperialist, to execute it for him. All went brilliantly to start with; rifles cracked in the passes, a British

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army—not for the first time—entered Kabul, a British Resident, with his staff, was duly installed at the Court of a new and apparently submissive Ameer, and another point scored in the game against Russia.

Beaconsfield had perhaps acquired some of that “hubris”, or insolent self-confidence, which is an offence to the gods. He was warned what would happen. The venerable Lord Lawrence, who knew more about India than any man living, uttered a solemn warning against trusting these English lives to Afghan faith. The Premier treated him with the insolent scorn that he had now grown accustomed to displaying towards opposition, and in which a Greek would have seen the sign of his approaching downfall. “They will all be murdered, every one of them”, the ex-Viceroy predicted, and he was right. Another war, more bloody and expensive than the last, had to be undertaken. And in another part of the world, the forward policy landed England in another troublesome and unpopular war with the Zulu nation—a war that started with the humiliating episode of an English force, several hundred strong, being wiped out of existence by a wild charge through the scrub. The nation was beginning to wonder whether it would not after all be better to be godly and quietly governed by Gladstone than to be led into more and more trouble and expense by a superannuated magician.

CHAPTER IX

HARD TIMES ON THE LAND

If anyone, inclined to superstition, had been looking for evidence that Beaconsfield's "hubris" had become an offence to the gods, he might have found it in the appalling luck he and his government had with the weather. The sun, that had shone upon the Liberals, hid his face from the Tories, and as the decade drew to an end, the weather grew steadily worse. In 1879 the farmers were in despair. The crops rotted in the fields, because it was impossible to harvest them. In Ireland conditions were even worse; farmers were everywhere ruined, and agrarian discontent assumed dangerous proportions. And in England, popular opinion, which is as much affected by the weather as by any other consideration, began to turn against a government that seemed incapable of creating prosperity.

It was not only in agriculture, which was after all England's principal industry, that there was depression. Luck had been equally out in the sphere of commerce and industry. After 1874, the boom in trade was followed by a prolonged slump and fall of prices. How serious was the depression and its effect on the well-being of the people may be judged from the following eloquent statistics. Between 1869 and 1874 the annual number of marriages, reckoned in thousands, had risen from 176 to 202; by 1879, it had fallen to 182. The corresponding figures of the number of persons committed for trial are, 15, 12 and 13.¹ This means that while, in

¹ *From the History of Twenty-five Years*, by Sir Spencer Walpole, Vol. IV, p. 380.

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1879, far fewer people could afford to set up house than five years earlier, the criminal population was swollen by those who had been driven by want into evil courses. The winter of 1878-9 was peculiarly distressful. Thousands of families in the towns were on the brink of starvation, and relief was organized on a large scale, the Prince of Wales taking a lead.

There was, however, one highly significant way in which the depression in commerce and industry differed from that in agriculture. It was destined to right itself. The cycle of lean years would be succeeded in due course by one of fat, and it would be found that there was still a net balance of progress, in spite of fluctuations. But what had happened in agriculture turned out to be something in the nature of a social disaster. For the leading English industry had received a set-back from which it was not destined ever properly to recover, and the great landed interest, which had counted for so much in English history, had the foundations of its power undermined.

The fact is that the series of bad harvests only had the effect of hastening on a decline which had been inevitable since Sir Robert Peel's abandonment of Protection, and which, it is arguable, no system of tariffs could have prevented, except at an unthinkable heavy cost to everybody except the landlords and farmers. Now that the United States had ceased to devote their energies to the destruction of American citizens and American wealth, they were free to develop their vast heritage of virgin lands that had formerly been the hunting-grounds of the Red Man. The Canadian Pacific Railway was stretching out from one ocean to another, and opening up that newly constituted Dominion's wealth of grain-fields. Russian and the Argentine were also becoming exporters of grain on a large scale. This competition with the British farmer for the home market was

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constantly being intensified by the improvement of communications—railways, and, above all, steamships. So that when the harvests failed, the price of grain, instead of rising, actually continued to fall, reaching a record low level in the worst year of all, 1879. This, of course, was highly pleasant for the consumer, and no doubt prevented the distress in the towns from reaching the proportions of actual famine. But it spelt sheer ruin for the farmer, and struck a heavy blow at the owners of landed estates.

The situation was made worse by the fact that agriculture, if the first of English industries, had not become, to anything like the same degree as factory work, skilled and scientific. Farmer Giles was no doubt a picturesque figure, with his hard hat and gaiters, riding to hounds once or twice a week, but the best of his friends could hardly have called him an up-to-date specialist. While times had continued good, he had been content to plod along more or less as his fathers had done, trusting to the soil to do its part of the job of making ends meet. But now that poor Mr. Giles was able to bring less and less produce to market—not only because of the unspeakable weather but frequently because his stock was depleted by epidemic disease—he found that he could get less and less cash for what he did bring. He had no idea of adapting himself to the new conditions by the intensive application of scientific method, still less by organized co-operation—for suspicion of the man on the next farm was part of his nature. He had trusted the good times to go on for ever and had lived freely up to his income. But now things had come to such a pass, that he had no longer the means of raising the rent on quarter day. His landlord—to do him justice—was not usually a Shylock, and was loath to press him to extremities. But whether the matter was settled by the farm passing to another tenant for what it would

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fetch in the market, or by the landlord consenting to go without part of his dues, the effect on the rent-roll was the same. The value of many great estates had been halved by the end of the century. Land had ceased to be a paying proposition.

The effect of this change was none the less profound because its consequences were not at first appreciated. To all appearance, country house life went on very much as it had before, nor was there any sensational change in the routine of a London season. The fact that the old walls of aristocratic exclusiveness had not fallen with a crash, like those of Jericho, but were swiftly and silently crumbling to ruin, was the less obvious, because the last thing the victorious besiegers wanted was to advertise their conquest. But one who lived in the country and observed what was going on about him would perceive how more and more old family estates were being sold up, and passing into the hands of those who, having made fortunes by business or speculation, valued the land less from a business point of view than as a means of achieving social merit. These newcomers were eventually—though not without much “contrivance” and expenditure of cash—successful in being “received”, and taking their places, in the “county set”.

It may be asked, what importance it was to anybody except the families themselves that the type of people embodied by Mr. Galsworthy in his squire-archal Hillcrests should be forced to yield up their old homes to that represented by the pushful Hornblowers, especially in view of the fact that the first object of the Hornblowers would be to turn the next generation of themselves into Hillcrests of the best public school and country house tradition. After all, English aristocratic society had never been incapable of absorbing a certain amount of new blood.

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But now the absorption was destined to go far beyond saturation point. It was less a question of Hillcrest assimilating Hornblower, than of Hornblower beginning to flood out Hillcrest. The standards of English upper-class society were ceasing to be aristocratic and becoming plutocratic. Another way of putting it would be to say that a larger section of upper-class society was ceasing to have any standards at all, save those of Pope Leo X, who, on his election to the highest dignity of Christendom, exclaimed: "Now that we have the Papacy let us enjoy it." Try as he would to attain the Hillcrest standpoint, it never occurred to Hornblower that wealth and gentility were not to be enjoyed to their utmost capacity of exploitation.

Whether this were a good or a bad thing in the long run, it was part of a change that was at work in every department of life and thought. The earlier Victorian social system had at least presented an imposing appearance of stability. In spite of his belief in progress, the old Victorian had been a man of settled convictions, of rigid moral standards, and a social status more or less determined. Now everything—beliefs, morals, standards, status—was being thrown into the melting-pot. It had yet to be seen what the effect would be.

But with whatever good reason we may deplore the passing of the old regime, this at least must be conceded, that the Hillcrests, while they had had their chance, had signally failed to profit by it. They had indeed set a standard of public service and personal honour that cannot be over-praised. But at a time when intellectual guidance was more necessary than ever before in the world's history, they had neglected intellect and despised culture. They had no interest to speak of in either art or science. They put their trust in a system of education that, while training the will, acted as an almost infallible

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extinguisher upon the intelligence. They were content to be men of leading without being men of light.

The alleged musical exploits of Nero and the bitter sectarian dissensions in Constantinople when the Moslem was thundering at the gates, were paralleled by the blind frivolity with which, while the gentry still had the chance of taking the lead in social and spiritual reconstruction, they flung themselves with furious energy into the task of outdoor amusement. There might have been something to be said for this, had they woven their sport, as the Greek did his athletics, into an ordered pattern of a life harmonious and beautiful. But racing, chasing and shooting had come to be pursued as ends in themselves. Fortunes and estates were dissipated on the turf, and an amount of energy and skill was put into the business of hunt organization that would have been invaluable if turned into socially profitable channels. And Hornblower, when he entered into the heritage, can hardly be blamed if he imagined that a sacramental devotion to such pursuits was the very acme of his coveted gentility. So far from his commercially bred intelligence serving to leaven the new upper class society, he was quite content, on entering the Holy of Holies, to deposit whatever he may have brought in the way of intellectual equipment, with some ostentation, in the outer courts.

Nevertheless, in fairness, we must not be blind to the other side of the picture—the extraordinary tenacity displayed by the Hillcrest class in resisting the complete submergence that threatened it. There is no upper class, anywhere in the world, that has retained so much of its position and prestige, and this is particularly so in districts remote from the great centres of population, Shropshire, for example, and Devonshire, to which even the motor-car cannot bring down noisy parties of joy-hunters for every

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week-end. And whether Hillcrest or Hornblower has prevailed, it has certainly proved to be the case that the vast majority of county constituencies, under a universal suffrage, are as safe seats for the local gentry and their nominees as in the days of the unreformed Parliament.

BOOK III
THE EIGHTIES

CHAPTER I

THE NEW MACHIAVELLIANISM

A decade had passed since the bard of the *Prophetic Times* had lifted up his voice and warned his countrymen that the end was near. Now that the seventies had passed into the eighties, that catastrophe still hung fire, and the end did not seem to have got appreciably nearer. Certainly there had been "clouds of darkness", the darkest of all being those literal rain-clouds that had ruined the last couple of harvests, and which the coming of winter had reinforced by a thick blanket of fog, but then no one but a farmer would have predicted an eternal recurrence of such damnable conditions. There had been wars—troublesome little wars that meant an extra penny or two on to that income tax which Mr. Gladstone had promised to abolish, but on the other hand there had been "peace with honour" and there was no apparent prospect of a major quarrel. England felt herself as safe behind her iron wall as she had ever been behind one of wood, and the Duke of Cambridge presided over the most smartly dressed army in Christendom. Times were certainly hard, with the rich cutting down their entertainments and the poor their meals, but there had been slumps before, worse than this, and a boom could not be far behind. Take her for all in all, England must have seemed, more than ever, an unpromising field for the activities of a Jeremiah.

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Amid all the progress that continued to excite pæans, there was a feeling of comfortable sameness. 1880 was surprisingly like 1870. There was the same Queen in the same august and widowed seclusion, the same popular Prince and Princess at the head of Society, the one as genial, the other as youthful as ever, the same two master statesmen confronting each other at the head of the same parties, with Tennyson and Browning, Ruskin and Arnold, Darwin, Spencer and Huxley, Manning and Newman, Morris and Rossetti, unlost and seemingly unloosable leaders in their respective spheres. Even fashion repeated itself. Dresses had begun to stick out behind in 1870—they were beginning to stick out again in 1880.

If there had been a tendency for Englishmen to be bored with their sober prosperity, under a Liberal ministry, at the beginning of the decade, they appeared to have been effectually cured of it by the end. There was a growing desire to put back the political clock at the first opportunity to where it had been before Mr. Disraeli had been called to office. A dashing policy was well enough in its way, and Lord Beaconsfield was more firmly established than ever in the affections of his adopted countrymen—but there were those extra pennies on the income tax, and perpetual petty alarums and excursions were beginning to get on John Bull's nerves. Another Gladstone ministry, like the one that had been in power in 1870, would guarantee the quiet life for which he had begun to long.

Apart from the perpetual irritation about "the Bear" and his activities, the average Englishman was little enough concerned about what might be going on abroad. He was a shade less insular, owing to the ever-increasing facilities for cheap and comfortable travel, and perhaps also to the admirable way in which the artists of his illustrated papers provided

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him with their impressions of personages and events beyond the seas. But he felt himself hardly at all concerned with such events, except as a benevolently interested spectator. Now that that troublesome fellow, Napoleon III, had quitted the stage, and now that the Balkan tangle had been unravelled, there seemed every prospect of a long period of peace. There was a sort of informal committee or Concert of the Great Powers for settling disputed questions, which Mr. Gladstone had made it one of the planks of his policy to cherish. And in the middle of Europe was the new-born German Empire, under its good old Protestant Kaiser, too strong to be attacked, too much of a "saturated Power" to be a menace to its neighbours—a mighty makeweight for a stable equilibrium. The "armed peace" had lasted through the decade—there seemed no reason why it should ever be broken.

There was one man, at least, who knew better—that Iron Chancellor who could make all the statesmen of Europe dance on the wires that he pulled from his room in the Wilhelmstrasse. The grey eyes beneath Bismarck's bushy brows were too clear-sighted to be deceived by the appearance of security. He knew—no one better—the desperate game he was doomed to play for his country's safety and for the peace of the world. It was the sign of his supreme mastery that the game looked perfectly safe and easy.

He had set out to unite Germany by Blood and Iron. He had done so, but at the price of making Blood and Iron supreme in Europe. There was no more nonsense about freedom and brotherhood. Every nation was out to seek her own, and more than her own, by any means. Every nation was arming to the teeth for an Armageddon, at some near or distant date, of which all were afraid, and for which all were feverishly preparing. Internationally it was a mad and barbarous world, far worse than

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that which old Thomas Hobbes had visualized as being the primitive state of mankind. For Hobbes had merely imagined a simple anarchy of savages, honest and straightforward egotists with no particular interest in clubbing one another except in the way of business, but these enormous Leviathans called nations were not only unrestrained by any law or morality from injuring their neighbours, but were each actually engaged in working up primitive selfishness into malignant egomania. Each was staking out claims to his neighbour's property, claims that could only be satisfied by force of arms. Beyond the frontiers of every nation of importance lay territory that it coveted, and meant to have sooner or later. And there were nations crushed out of official existence that never ceased to dream of the day of their deliverance—by Blood and Iron. The one thing that kept the iron from striking and the blood from pouring was the fear that even the hardest anarchy had of the consequences. But the cult of intensive patriotism was everywhere being exploited to make that fear seem base and treasonable.

Bismarck was no philanthropist. He had no scruples, and no ideals beyond that of simple loyalty to the Leviathan of which he happened to be a cell. But his was—so far as such a thing is possible—a sane selfishness. Blood and Iron had served his purpose, and now he would fain have laid the demons he had evoked. He was never more sincere than when he described Germany as a saturated Power. Now that all was Deutsch from the Vosges to the Vistula, he had no sentimental dreams of expansion, even in the colonial field. Now that he had settled the account with France, he only desired to see Germany secure in the enjoyment of her heritage, and at peace with all the world.

But hardly had her victorious armies withdrawn behind their frontier than it was borne in upon

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Bismarck that the account was not settled at all, and never would be so long as the black, white and red flag floated over Strassburg and Metz. It was the one great mistake which marred all the rest of his life's work, that he had given way to the generals on this point, as he had refused to give way when they had proposed to humiliate and destroy Austria four years before. A generous gesture to defeated France might have done more for the security of Germany than a score of fortresses. By robbing and humiliating her, Germany, for the best strategical reasons, had aroused all the unforgiving hatred of the insulted Latin. The peace concluded at Frankfurt would last exactly as long as France was restrained by fear from springing at her neighbour's throat. As Bismarck himself said with prophetic insight in 1887, "War is certain if France thinks she is the stronger and can win. That is my unalterable conviction. . . . If she won she would not display our moderation in 1871. She would bleed us white, and if we won, after being attacked, we would do the same. The war of 1870 would be child's play compared with 1890 or whatever the date."¹ Germany must therefore remain armed to the teeth and, as Bismarck put it, *toujours en vedette*.

At first, logically enough, he had toyed with the idea of invoking Blood and Iron once again, and finishing off France before she could fairly get on her feet. But here Queen Victoria, who, though a lover of Germany, was far from being a lover of Bismarck, threw her powerful influence into the scale for peace. It also became more than doubtful whether the Tsar would stand by in face of so outrageous a use of the Prussian jack-boot. So that simple solution had to be dropped, and Bismarck, for the rest of his life, devoted himself to the task of delaying the hour

¹ Quoted in *History of Modern Europe*, by C. P. Gooch, p. 132.

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of ultimately inevitable reckoning. Out of no love for mankind, he had become the mighty Atlas on whose shoulders reposed the peace of civilization.

His problem could be simply stated. France would never dare to attack Germany single-handed. It would only be when, by some cunning system of alliances, she had got the odds in her favour, that she would dare make her spring. Hence it must be Germany's first object to keep her neighbour securely isolated. It might be worth trying to see whether her interests might be diverted into other and harmless fields of expansion, so that in time she would come to forget the rape of her two provinces. But the iron had entered too deeply into the Latin soul to render this a hopeful proposition. Even if Metz had been forgotten, the tramp of the Prussian regiments on their silly route march through the streets of Paris had awakened echoes that had never died away.

Bismarck had gone about his task with a skill and finesse never surpassed, if ever equalled, in the records of diplomacy. As far as the world could have been made safe for peace and for Germany, he made it so. His first move was to cement the bond of common interest uniting the three great Imperial Houses of Hohenzollern, Hapsburg, and Romanoff, the Holy Three denounced by Byron, the natural champions of autocracy and divine right in a world sown with the seeds of revolution, partners in a common crime, the partition and enslavement of Poland. So long as this League of Emperors held, nothing could shake any of its members, and Bismarck's problem was solved. But there was one fatal flaw in the scheme. In the most dangerous quarter of all Europe, the Balkan Peninsula, the ambitions of Austria and Russia came into fatal collision. Both coveted the inheritance of the Sick Man Turkey; both were prepared to go to all

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lengths to get it. So long as this antagonism lasted, there was no guarantee of German and European security in an Entente of Emperors. Accordingly Bismarck had to look round for another combination. He decided that if the worst came to the worst, and Germany had to choose between one ally and the other, she must hold fast to her Teutonic kinsman on the Danube. Into this German-Austrian combination he sought to draw Austria's hereditary foe, Italy. This seemingly impossible feat he accomplished by a piece of Mephistophelean finesse. He blandly persuaded France to forestall Italy in the game of African grab by seizing Tunis. The bait was eagerly swallowed and Italy was as justly aggrieved as a burglar who finds his selected crib cracked by a rival. The result was the famous Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy, a solid military bloc embracing nearly the whole of Central Europe and cutting the Continent in half.

Even this was not enough for Bismarck. He had gained Italy, but he did not want to lose Russia. He therefore double-crossed his Austrian partner by inducing the Tsar to conclude a secret Reinsurance Treaty with Germany, that removed all danger of an attack from that side. There remained only England. Bismarck had no love for that hotbed of Liberal ideas, and the mutual dislike that existed between himself and Queen Victoria's daughter, the Crown Princess of Prussia, did not sweeten his feelings towards the country of her birth. But he was not the man to let sentiment affect his political combinations, and he would gladly have drawn England into his network of alliances. Failing this, he counted on at least her benevolent neutrality, and never did he dream of entering into naval, or even serious colonial rivalry with her. That German statesmanship should ever goad England into ranging herself on the side of France was a piece of suicidal

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madness of which he could hardly have conceived even his eventual supplanters capable. In fact, he had found another African apple—this time of Anglo-French discord—in Egypt, and with the most engaging friendliness he pressed England to partake of it.

Thus was the peace of Europe secured by the man of Blood and Iron. He made no attempt to get at the root of her discontents or to heal the anarchy of her nations. Grievances were left to fester, hatreds were inflamed to fever heat, armaments were piled up with murderous prodigality, competitive tariff walls rose higher and higher. But the master diplomatist aimed at keeping the peace by sheer finesse, and, so long as he remained in power, he succeeded. France, chafing in impotent rage, saw every avenue of revenge barred against her. Germany was leagued with Austria and Italy, was reinsured against Russia, was friendly with England. There came a time when it seemed as if French patience could endure no longer. A rather ridiculous figure arose in a certain General Boulanger, who was hailed by the Parisian mob as the hero destined to accomplish *la revanche*. Old Emperor William, now a nonagenarian, was talking of riding West again, at the head of his armies. Even if those armies had gone through Belgium there seemed to be no chance of England going beyond a mild protest. But Bismarck kept his temper, and the crisis, and Boulanger, eventually fizzled out.

Europe was now launched upon an iron age of selfishness and realism. The supreme catastrophe of war had been held at arm's length by the might of one man's genius. But Bismarck could not last for ever, and when he was gone, who would be able to prevent hatred and anarchy, covetousness and mistrust, from sweeping on to their inevitable and murderous consummation? Bismarck knew, and

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prophesied: the war would not come in his time, but come it would, and it would start in the Balkans.

England continued to bask in serene ignorance of these dangers that threatened her, together with the rest of the civilized world. It was nothing to her that Liberal idealism was a spent force on the Continent. Disraeli, an incurable romantic posing as a strong, silent superman, had given her a taste of something that might have passed for *realpolitik*. She had not liked the taste and had put the splendid chalice from her. Mr. Gladstone was the man to whom she instinctively turned for leadership, Gladstone, who believed that a nation was a moral entity, that honesty and justice were the best policy, and that a merely selfish patriotism was unworthy of Christian England. "Remember", he was not afraid to say, "that He who has united you as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love; that that mutual love is not limited by the shores of this island, is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilization. . . ." Imagine such language on the lips of Bismarck! This moral fervour was reinforced by a truly bourgeois canniness, that nobody, at the time, thought incongruous. A forward policy, dictated by selfishness, was thoroughly bad business. Mercy and profits had met together, economy and peace had kissed each other.

In the election of 1880, Gladstone's personality and principles carried all before them. When he went North to the constituency of Midlothian, that he had elected to contest, his progress was a triumph such as no English statesman had enjoyed since it had "rained gold boxes" on the elder Pitt. Wherever the train stopped crowds thronged the platform waiting for a speech; even where it did not stop, they thronged to catch a glimpse, if it might be, of the hero of the hour. It seemed to Gladstone, now

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turned seventy, as if the arm of the Lord had visibly bared itself for work he had made His own. The hand of God was upon him, and he denounced Beaconsfield and his Tories with all the fervour of a revivalist.

The electorate was ripe for conversion. There was a tremendous swing back to Liberalism. It seemed as if England had determined to rest true to her own self and her ideals, whatever monstrous gods her neighbours might choose to go whoring after. Blood and Iron were not for her. The good old cause of freedom was the good old cause still, and she was prepared to seal it with a thumping majority. In 1880 she took her stand where she had taken it in 1868. The more she progressed, the more she remained the same. Her righteousness endured, how then could she be moved?

CHAPTER II

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ACTION

"I should be my first if I could throw my second and hit my whole." Such was the amiable riddle which some of us can remember to have been current in the days of our childhood, and the answer was—"Gladstone"! Surely, if Queen Victoria ever tolerated a joke, she must have condescended to an august chuckle when this one was explained to her, and perhaps may even have vouchsafed the momentous admission, "We are amused."

It is not so difficult for us to understand the transports of enthusiasm into which Gladstone was capable of lashing great masses of men, as it is to realize the intensity of hatred with which he was regarded by so many other people, from his Sovereign downwards, in the latter stages of his career. In an age of respectability, his was a pre-eminently respectable figure; in an age of earnestness, he was second to none in God-fearing piety; in an age that prized domesticity, his home life approached perfection. And yet one can cite an instance, probably not unique, in which a lady, more than thirty years after his death, has positively refused to sit down at table opposite to a portrait of "old Gladstone". When asked why, she has answered with intense feeling—"What, opposite that horrible man!" and declined any further explanation.

Gladstonophobia was capable of taking even more grotesque forms. Mr. Gladstone and his wife were known to be particularly interested in the rescue of what they would have called "fallen women". There were opponents who were known to have offered

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large rewards for the report of any indiscretion that would have formed the basis of a plausible scandal. It was perhaps some echo of the stories that were invented at this time that caused one unfortunate biographer, of the modern school, to cap a rival's dipsomaniac Gordon with his own nymphomaniac Gladstone—only, unlike that rival, he failed to get away with it. Perhaps the strangest case of all is that of a great Tory nobleman, who had the interior of all the chamber utensils in his castle adorned with portraits of the G.O.M., the one reserved for his own use being provided with a conveniently enormous eye.

On the other hand, seldom had any statesman been so extravagantly loved. His name was one to conjure with far beyond the bounds of England. In Italy, in Greece, in the Balkans, his reputation as the friend of liberty and international righteousness was an asset of priceless value to his country. Whatever might be the feeling of their betters, the common people heard him gladly, and this in spite of the fact that he never condescended to the ordinary arts of the demagogue—he invariably assumed that his audience was inspired by as high moral sentiments as himself, and was as capable as the House of Commons of appreciating the sonorous, but meticulously qualified periods that he thundered at it with inexhaustible facility, and with just a suspicion of the Northern burr in his voice :

He holds them with his glittering eye,
They cannot choose but hear.

It was perhaps this power, and Gladstone's willingness to use it, that accounts for the otherwise inexplicable resentment he aroused in those who did not come under his spell. Incapable though he was of sympathizing with any doctrine remotely tending to political or social revolution, he was arousing a new spirit which they instinctively felt to be dangerous. Politics had continued to be a gentlemanly game in

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spite of the Reform Bill. Statesmen would orate for hours on end in the House, and enliven their discourses with classic tags for which no crib was supposed to be needed. But the utmost any self-respecting minister would do outside, was to deliver, like Lord Palmerston, an occasional address, perhaps once a year, to his constituents, and even he was thought to be going rather far when he indulged in verbal sparring matches with a butcher. But Gladstone accepted the logical consequences of a democratic franchise. Demos was Cæsar ; to Cæsar he would go. Against the subtleties of Disraeli's pro-Turk policy, he sought to arouse the moral indignation of Tom, Dick and Harry. He was capable, when roused, of using language about the rich and comfortable classes calculated to put the most undesirable notions into the heads of those to whom God, in His accommodating wisdom, had assigned a humbler station of life. No wonder that Queen Victoria was in a state bordering on panic when she realized that this dangerous firebrand was to be forced on her in the capacity of Prime Minister.

But it was not only as the herald of a new spirit that Gladstone was disliked. If in one sense he was an innovator, in another he was a reactionary. He had no part nor lot in the intensive nationalism that already reigned supreme on the Continent, and whose influence was already beginning to be felt in England. Beaconsfield, on being twitted with the selfishness of his policy, had replied complacently that it was as selfish as patriotism, and Beaconsfield's admirers trusted him for the precise reason that he could be relied on to play the game for his side with the single object of scoring, by every available means, every possible point. They had no use for moral scruples that merely cramped their champion's style. Such a conception of patriotism was regarded by Gladstone with literally a holy horror, and in coming forth from his retirement to oppose Beaconsfield and all his works,

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he was acting in the spirit of Elijah—"If the Lord be God, serve him, and if Baal, serve him." In his solemn self-communings on the eve of his seventieth birthday, he spoke of his battle for justice, humanity, freedom and law, and of himself as having been forced into the work as a great and high election of God.

But the Man of the People and the Man of God did not complete this strangely complex personality. There was another Gladstone, the hardened politician, with already nearly half a century's experience of the wire-pulling and compromise that are, day in and day out, among the necessities of a political career. The major prophet of the platform might present quite a different aspect in the lobby or the cabinet room. A curious sidelight on his state of mind is afforded by an incident that occurred at this time. Gladstone's moral indignation had happened to take the strange form of insulting Austria, by a platform statement that you could nowhere put your hand on the map and say, "Here Austria has done good"—though anyone who had seen the Turkish cannon ball lodged in the wall of her old cathedral will not have much hesitation in putting his hand on Vienna. When Gladstone came into office there was not unnaturally trouble with the Austrian ambassador, and the Premier's way of dealing with it was by a naïve admission that, at the time the *Philippic* had been launched, he had been "in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility". The doctrine of degrees of responsibility for the spoken word—especially on the lips of a moral evangelist—is, to put it mildly, casuistical.

But there was a curious streak of inconsistency running through Gladstone's career. There were times when he seemed capable of playing fast and loose with his principles. Who could have predicted that the champion of freedom would have come out as

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the supporter of the slave-holding South against the North? Why should the right of peoples struggling to be free be valid in Bulgaria but void in Egypt? Why should there be one law for Catholic Ireland and another for Protestant Ulster? It was not that Gladstone was capable of conscious dishonesty, but that his mental grasp was by no means commensurate with the terrific force of his will. Those who have tried to wade through the long and dreary record of his writings and correspondence can never, for a moment, have felt themselves in contact with a mind of the first order, such a mind, even, as that of Disraeli, whose sayings stick in the memory, while the thunders of Gladstone have long ago rumbled into oblivion.

Such was the man who had been called to office in order that he might bring back his country to the paths of peace and Liberalism, and that he might dissociate her once and for all from the cult of Blood and Iron, of national egotism and greed, that had already captured the Continent. Let but England stand for righteousness and freedom, and those other things, power and prestige and prosperity, would follow in their train as surely as night follows day. A ministry was formed to put these principles into practice. It was not exactly the team of idealists that one would have expected after the heroics of Midlothian. Half of its members were opulent and worldly-wise noblemen, who would never have harboured anything so ill-bred as enthusiasm. Even the Queen would have felt herself quite safe with Lord Hartington or Lord Granville at Downing Street. The chief concession to democratic progress consisted in the admission to the Cabinet of the Radical Mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, but this was rather in Gladstone's despite than with his good will. And there was John Bright as at least one whole-hearted exponent of Christian idealism among nations.

History records no more tragically ironical contrast

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than that between the promise of Gladstone's ministry, and its performance during the five and a half years of its existence. Blood and iron in Egypt, disaster in the Sudan, coercion rampant in Ireland, the Transvaal Boers driven to assert their freedom by throwing their British masters, bag and baggage, out of the country . . . was it for this work that the arm of the Lord had bared itself? And yet the fault was not that of the peaceful and high-principled policy to which the Man of God had pledged himself at Midlothian, but to the fact that Gladstone, the politician, lacked the strength or the consistency to translate that policy into deeds.

He had started fairly enough by courageously scrapping the forward policy by which, in Afghanistan, Beaconsfield and his Viceroy had already involved the country in two wars and one massacre. The right and prudent way with the Afghans was to clear out of their territory, and leave them to manage their affairs in their own way. Yes—but the imperial strategists had discovered the key of India in the Afghan city of Candahar, behind whose walls the remains of an Anglo-Indian army, beaten in a pitched battle at Maiwand, had taken refuge. The most sensible word on this subject was curiously enough spoken by Beaconsfield himself. Early in March, 1881, when the shadows were already beginning to close round him, he came, keyed up by drugs, to the House of Lords, to make what was to prove his last considerable pronouncement on public affairs. Mr. T. P. O'Connor, who witnessed the scene, reported that he had "a dreadfully inanimate look" and appeared "like a man in a dream". "There are", said Beaconsfield, "several places that are called the Keys of India. There is Merv . . . then"—and the old man's memory wandered—"there is a place whose name I forget . . . but, my Lords," he said, gathering himself together for the last of those oracular pro-

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nouncements which are among the immortal things of politics, "the key of India is not Herat or Candahar. The Key of India is London." Beaconsfield did not live to see the reversal, that he had thus magnanimously justified, of his own policy. The defeated army, of course, had to be extricated, and General Roberts's brilliantly staffed march from Cabul to Candahar wiped out the humiliation of Maiwand. After that the key was left to the Afghans to turn if they could, and in that part of the world at least Britain contrived to cut the losses of a forward policy and to live, if not exactly in love and amity, at least in peace with her neighbours.

Among the victims of Disraeli's policy whose wrongs Gladstone had eloquently pledged himself to redress were the Transvaal Boers, whose country had been annexed to England in 1877. It was only natural that the Boers, being simple folk, should have imagined that Gladstone would have lost no time in honouring his word, and leaving them, as well as the Afghans, to their own devices. Instead of which, the Boers received a curt intimation that under no circumstances could the Queen's authority in the Transvaal be relinquished. Partly the explanation may have been that Gladstone was toying with some idea of South African federation under the Crown, but his inaction is probably even more due to the fact that old men cannot be bothered with too many things at once, and accordingly the Transvaal had to wait till the Premier had leisure to think about it. There seemed no hurry; the military governor was a certain Sir Owen Lanyon, a young colonel with a creditable record of service against black men, who applied the methods of the drill sergeant to the rule of a freedom-loving people, and complacently assured the home authorities that there was no chance of trouble. So the Boers not unnaturally took the only way left to them of vindicating the principles of

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Gladstone drunk with rhetoric against the practice of Gladstone sober in office, and the Government found themselves called upon to deal with a people "rightly struggling", in Gladstonian language, "to be free".

The Government, which, to do it justice, only wanted to get out of the mess on any terms that would have saved its face, now utterly lost control over the situation. The British commander in Natal, Sir George Colley, was reputed to be a master of tactics, and with the handful of trained regulars at his disposal esteemed himself fully capable of dispersing any mob of undisciplined and un-uniformed farmers that might attempt to bar his way to the relief of the besieged British garrisons. He tried a frontal attack, in the best Aldershot style, and the Boers, all of them expert marksmen, fired into the target presented by the advancing line, and shot it to pieces. The Government now decided to grant the substance of the Boer demands, and Colley was instructed to forward a proposal to Kruger, the Boer chief, for a suspension of hostilities. All would have been well had Colley waited for an answer, but a bright idea struck him—he would retrieve his laurels as a tactician by seizing, during the night, a certain Majuba Hill that dominated the Boer position at Laing's Nek. The Boers were at first greatly impressed, and had actually begun to inspan their oxen. But on second thoughts they decided to pit the tactics of the hunter against those of the theorist. Creeping from rock to rock, they reached the crest, practically unharmed, and commenced picking off the astonished redcoats as if they had been a head of buck, finally stampeding them in wild panic, and killing their leader. Gladstone was at least firm enough to abstain from what he rightly described as the blood-guiltiness of using the now overwhelming forces that were mustering under Colley's successor, to avenge this entirely legitimate act of self-defence, and he conceded the terms that

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the Government had already offered and the Boers would have been prepared to accept, if Colley had given them time to do so, namely, independence under British suzerainty, a word to which it was hard to attach any precise meaning. But the episode was not one of which any Englishman could be proud, and it was plain to the world that it had needed the argument of leaden bullet to make Gladstone in office honour the word and principles of Gladstone out of office.

The contrast between promise and performance was most glaring of all in Egypt. This is not the place to tell the long and intricate story of how a Government, pledged to Liberalism and non-aggression, succeeded in following the steps of Esarhaddon and Cambyzes, and effecting the military conquest of the Nile valley. It is the more extraordinary when we reflect that even Beaconsfield had resisted the temptation of embarking on such a venture. Bismarck had dangled that bait before him in vain at the time of the Berlin Conference—but perhaps it was that the cunning old Jew had for once penetrated the Chancellor's real motive, for ever since Napoleon's time France had regarded Egypt as her special preserve. It is more probable, however, that he was clinging to his obsession of preserving the Turkish Empire intact.

When the government of righteousness rushed in armed, where even Beaconsfield had feared to tread, it did so in no higher capacity than that of usurer's bailiff. Egypt had been under the rule of a by no means wholly contemptible despot, Ismail by name, who intended to cut a magnificent figure in the world—he had dazzled Napoleon III and his beautiful consort by the magnificence of his hospitality at the opening of the Suez Canal; for him Verdi had composed the opera *Aïda*. To do him justice, his extravagance was not entirely selfish, for he had grandiose schemes of building public works. But all had to be paid for by wringing the uttermost farthing

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out of the wretched peasantry. Nor was Ismail content with the plunder of the living. He would finance his projects as Christian nations financed their wars, by pledging the credit of posterity. Long after he was dead and rotten, the fellahen of the Nile should sweat and starve for things he had enjoyed—and if to the end of time, so much the better.

This was a highly convenient arrangement also for the Western financier and investor. For if Ismail got the uttermost farthing in taxation out of his subjects, it was not unfair that the uttermost rate of interest should be screwed out of Ismail. And to do that merry gentleman credit, he was no skinflint. He had no grasp of economics, and provided he could get what he wanted by the simple process of subscribing his signature, he did not greatly care what form of words might happen to be over it. The morrow—and posterity—could take thought for the things of itself. And so the retired clergyman, the poor widow, the thrifty French *rentier*, could just contrive to make both ends meet by taking up Egyptian Bonds, and sucking the life-blood of the Fellah through a long pipe that passed through the palace of Cairo.

Egyptian Bonds were a godsend provided only that one could be sure of their being paid punctually every half year. It was whispered among financiers that high interest meant bad security. What if the pipe should break somewhere, and the Egyptian appropriate to himself the fruits of his own toil? Such dishonesty was not to be thought of for a moment. What were armies and fleets, what were Martinis and Gatling guns for, if not to keep dusky defaulters up to the mark? Ismail might go finally bankrupt, and retire into a luxurious private life, but Ali and Hassan must go on paying for their ex-sovereign's megalomania, or Sir Garnet Wolseley and seventeen thousand Englishmen would know the reason why.

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One cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, and Gladstone could not maintain the solvency of Egyptian Bonds without crushing, by blood and iron, an insurgent people wrongly—it is to be presumed—struggling to be free. A certain Arabi Pasha, an officer in the Khedive's service, put himself at the head of a military revolt, whose object was to assert the principle of Egypt for the Egyptians. The Khedive was no countrymen of theirs, and Arabi might naturally have expected the sympathy of Gladstone for the policy of expelling this particular Turk, bag and baggage. But when he went further to apply "bag and baggage" to the foreign bums who were there to exact perpetual usury from Egypt on the Turk's account, there was nothing for it but to shoot and shell those Egyptian patriots into a proper sense of their obligations.

It had been originally proposed to levy forcible distraint in conjunction with France, but owing to one of the usual kaleidoscopic changes in French politics, the French suddenly decided to back out when it became a question of actual bloodshed. But Gladstone was determined to stick at nothing, and it is on record that he seriously contemplated inviting the unspeakable Sultan to "restore order" with those self-same Turkish troops whose atrocities he had so recently denounced throughout the length and breadth of Britain. A picturesque spectacle was witnessed of British warships steaming leisurely up and down, pounding to pieces the forts of Alexandria, and slaughtering a number of their defenders variously estimated between 300 and 2,000. The immediate effect was the opening of the jails and a regular pogrom of Christians, followed by the landing of bluejackets and the shooting down of Moslems. Then, after an interval, there came news of lifeguardsmen sabring and Bengal Lancers pigsticking terrified "Gippys" as they fled across the desert, of a night

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march under the stars, of pipes skirling in the dawn and Highlanders plying the bayonet inside Arabi's redoubts at Tel-el-Kebir, of the citadel of Cairo surrendered.

It was for a time doubtful whether a leaf would not be taken out of the Roman book, and the triumph graced by the slaughter of the enemy chief. Queen Victoria's simple soul was, as she herself put it, "distressed and alarmed" that "that arch-rebel and traitor Arabi (who she believes *everyone*, including Mr. Gladstone himself, wish should meet the punishment he deserves)" should so much as be provided with the means of defending himself at his trial. But for once Mr. Gladstone had only too little need of being kept up to the mark by his Sovereign. He himself was "almost", as he characteristically expressed it, "driven to the conclusion" that the captive general was "a bad man", and ought to pay the extreme penalty. On which Gladstone's biographer, John Morley, has the following ineffable comment:

"It is a great mistake to suppose that Mr. Gladstone was all leniency, or that when he thought ill of men he stopped at palliating words or at half-measures."

Luckily for the honour of England, Gladstone did eventually escape from the blood-guiltiness of having allowed the patriot leader to be done to death by the Khedive, and Arabi, instead of sharing the fate of Hofer and Wallace, was sent into not uncomfortable banishment at Ceylon. Thus were two sovereigns united in the bond of common grief. Queen Victoria was begged to send a soothing message to Khedive Tewfik. "It will give him courage", wired Lord Dufferin, "to face his womankind, who are frantic." But the enraged old lady stood stoutly by her sex. "The 'womankind'", she wrote, "show a right feeling in being 'frantic'", and nothing would induce her to compliment their lord and master on weakness

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of which she “*so highly disapproves*”—even though she blames it entirely on to her Government.

One who was horrified for somewhat different reasons was the good old Quaker, John Bright, who found it so difficult to reconcile the bombardment of Alexandria with the principles of Christian morality that he retired from the Government.

Of course England had only conquered Egypt with the intention of evacuating it as soon as her self-imposed duty of restoring order should be accomplished, and of course the date of that evacuation was, and is fifty years afterwards, timed for the Greek Kalends. Blood calls for blood, and no sooner had Arabi's army been safely dispersed than the whole of Egypt's vast hinterland of the Sudan burst into a flame of holy war. A false prophet—so Her Britannic Majesty characterized him—was carrying everything before him. The Prophet of Midlothian was at his wits' end. He had counted on a short and not too expensive war against Egyptians who could be trusted to run away, but he had not reckoned on being plunged into a fresh war with fanatics of whom these same Egyptians were too frightened even to run. The butcher's bill of his Government would top that of its predecessor. But what was to be done? Was England, having struck the sword out of Egypt's hand, to let her be deprived of those upper waters of the Nile, the control of which, even in the days of the Pharaohs, had been regarded as vital to her prosperity? Perhaps she might agree to cut Egypt's loss, at a pinch, but even so, could she abandon the Egyptian garrisons in the Sudan to the fate that awaited them at the hand of the Mahdi's hordes?

Gladstone had studied the classics, and he knew the functions of a *deus ex machina*. If he could not afford an army, he might trust to the magic of one man's personality to solve at least the problem of the garrisons. Such a man was General Gordon, who

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had made an invincible army out of unwarlike Chinamen, and might perform a similar miracle with Egyptians. Gordon was in action what Gladstone was in eloquence, a man conscious of a divine mission, strong in the Lord and the power of His might. He was also a man of chivalrous honour. The task he had been sent to perform was a forlorn hope from the start, and the flashes of intuitive genius, by which alone he might have had an off-chance of accomplishing it, were quenched by the veto of his superiors, the Government at home and Sir Evelyn Baring, the British agent in Egypt.

What the Government appears to have expected of Gordon was that he should give up his mission as a bad job, and save his own skin by leaving the garrisons to their fate. But the people of Khartoum, where he had made his headquarters, had trusted him as if he had been an angel of deliverance. To clear out and leave them to the Mahdi's tender mercies was unthinkable. He therefore declared positively that he would not leave the Sudan till everyone who wanted to go down had had a chance to do so. "*If any emissary or letter comes up ordering me to come down, I will not obey it, but will stop here and fall with the town and run all risks.*" Gordon was, by Gladstone's own admission, a hero of heroes, but it does not need a hero of heroes to take the only course open to a gentleman.

The tragedy of Gordon's fate is so rich in dramatic incident that one is apt to overlook the fact that to hold that ill-fortified and ill-provisioned town from March of one year to January of the next, with troops too cowardly, under normal circumstances, to retain the use of their legs at the sight of a dervish, constitutes one of the finest feats of arms in history. The Government—or a majority of them—would not have stuck at leaving Gordon to take the consequences of his obstinacy. Gladstone in particular had no patience

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with a man of God who was so little a man of the world. He too could stand to his guns, for like a certain absentee Irish landlord, the Grand Old Man was not to be intimidated by threats to murder his agent. But public opinion was less stoical, and was rising to fever heat as the months passed and nothing was done. Even Lord Hartington's ponderous intelligence was waking to the consciousness that to leave Gordon to be starved out and murdered was one of those things that are not done. Of course the expedition was at long last got under way, and even so, when every hour was of importance, nothing would satisfy the "brass hats" but to make a full-dress affair of it, to spend weeks collecting a staff and discussing plans and perfecting details of organization. Everyone knows the sequel—the blow struck in the air; the steamboats of the relief force arriving just too late; Gordon's head stuck between branches with the kites pecking at his eyes, as others have since pecked at his good name.

The Queen was never more representative of her people than when she told her Prime Minister, with studied publicity, exactly what she thought of him. It was a long, long way from Midlothian to Khartoum! But here, after the shedding of more blood than had ever been charged to the account of Beaconsfield, was England with her foot firmly, though not formally, planted in Egypt, and the Queen-Empress in fact, though not in title, a Queen Pharaoh, in succession to Hatshepsut and Cleopatra. It is only fair to say that England, in compensation for her offices as publican, gave Egypt incomparably the best administration that the land had enjoyed since the days of the Cæsars. To be efficiently governed by infidels was not the same thing as Egypt for the Egyptians, but not more different than the reality of Empire founded in the lust for dividends and achieved by Blood and Iron, from that vision of human beings

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united in the bonds of mutual and all-embracing love, that Gladstone the righteous had conjured up in the mind's eye of his countrymen—could it have been only five years before ?

CHAPTER III

THE IRISH ULCER

There was a man in whom the spirit of the new age was more dramatically embodied even than in Bismarck. He was a ruthless and uncompromising realist, of passionless exterior, few and rough-hewn words, a forbidding manner, and an imperious will that swept resistlessly to its goal over all obstacles and all scruples. The impelling force of that will was a fierce and bigoted nationalism. He had neither romance nor sentiment in his composition, or if he had, he kept them for that part of his life which was hidden as long as possible from the world. His name was Charles Stewart Parnell.

With the breeding of an aristocrat, he combined—what was not uncommon in English aristocrats—the education of a boor. But this Irishman had what no study could impart, a vision that pierced, like an X-ray, to the heart of problems of which other men could see only the surface. He, alone among his countrymen, saw that the English conquest of Ireland, as established in the Act of Union of 1801, though it seemed to put Ireland at the mercy of England, might have precisely the opposite effect, if only Ireland knew how to play the cards that fate, and England, had dealt into her hand.

Any Irishman could see that the Act of Union was but a mockery of free government as far as Ireland was concerned. Such of the Irish representatives as did not range themselves with one or other of the orthodox British parties, formed a group that could be voted down on every issue, and whose chief

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privilege was that of letting off a little harmless steam. Meanwhile the English garrison of landlords, mostly absentee, remained fastened like leeches on to her soil, and exploited their privileges with a vigour that no medieval baron—whose serfs had at least had security of tenure—would have dreamed of applying. The condition of the Irish peasantry, their numbers halved by famine, rack-rented if they improved their holdings, flung out of their cabins to starve if the landlord's optimism or covetousness failed to materialize on rent day, was, according to such impartial testimony as that of General Gordon, worse than that of any people in the world. That a folk so crushed and helpless could have the power of dictating terms to its conquerors seemed wildly impossible. And yet the clear-sighted realism of Parnell divined that the means of effecting this miracle were actually at Ireland's command.

If John Bull had been a conscious or logical tyrant, he might have succeeded better. But in his own honest estimation he was no tyrant. He really believed in the justice and fair play of the settlement he had imposed on his neighbour. Galway, in proportion, was more generously represented than Kent in Parliament. If Paddy had to pay his rent, so had Hodge. What was sauce for the English goose was sauce for the Irish gander. Accordingly John Bull was scrupulous in preserving all the forms of constitutional liberty, however little these forms might signify in reality. But—and this was Parnell's discovery—in conceding to Ireland but a counterfeit of liberty, England had also fatally compromised her own. Quite a small group of Irishmen could turn the Mother of Parliaments into a bear-garden. A compact Irish party must sooner or later find itself holding the balance between English Liberals and Tories, and consequently in such a position of power that no ministry could hold office save by its per-

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mission and on its terms. The minimum of these terms would be Home Rule, with as near an approach to independence as possible.

To attain this end, nothing would serve short of a policy as ruthless and at the same time as coolly thought out as Bismarck's Blood and Iron. Many an Irish patriot had believed in shedding blood long before Parnell, who always shrank from crude violence, appeared on the scene. There were the Fenians, a party of physical force mostly recruited from among the American Irish; there was the formidable league called the Clan na Gael. But sporadic violence offered no remedy for Ireland's discontents. John Bull was nothing if not obstinate, and an occasional outrage only had the effect of putting up his back.

When Parnell was first elected to Parliament in 1875, he found the Irish party in a state of amiable and accepted impotence. Its leader was Isaac Butt, a man of the old-fashioned Liberal persuasion. He was a good-hearted, companionable fellow of whom everyone was fond, and whom hardly anyone took seriously. He was allowed to waste the time of Parliament by an annual motion in favour of Home Rule, which was tolerantly debated and duly thrown out.

"They know", said *Punch*, in 1874, of Butt and his followers, "that the ear of Parliament is closed, the mind of Parliament made up, on the point, even as the ear and mind of John Bull out of Parliament."

Punch was moved to a good deal of rather heavy merriment about a Butt without a bottom, a Butt that won't hold water, and so forth, while the idea of an Irish Parliament struck him as so excruciatingly funny—and Irish—that he formulated a set of standing orders for it, as for instance that the Speaker should not speak except when he is talking. Which

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gentlemanly English badinage was the reward of gentlemanly Irish behaviour.

There was another member of the Irish party who was, like Punch, a hunchback, a coarse-grained, libidinous, uneducated Ulsterman called Joseph Biggar. This man had no use for gentlemanly methods, and did not want to be popular—at any rate with Englishmen. He desired nothing better than to be the best-hated man in the House of Commons. There was taking shape in his mind a policy for Ireland that was the same in principle, as that of Moses for Israel. The people were being held in bondage, and the only way to soften the heart of Pharaoh and induce him to let them go was to afflict him with such plagues that the situation would become intolerable. The plague that Biggar had in store for the Mother of Parliaments was called obstruction. The House was a gentlemanly assembly, and its rules had been framed, like the constitution of Republican Rome, on the understanding that they would be applied in a reasonable spirit. But Biggar did not want to be reasonable. He was like a mechanic with the run of a factory, doing his damndest to smash or clog or corrode the machinery. He was one of the worst speakers that ever held forth, but the rules put no limit on the length of a member's eloquence, and it was nothing to Biggar that he was irrelevant and inaudible, provided that he could be also interminable.

And yet he cannot be said to have started the game of obstruction. English members had been for some time in the cheerful habit of taking advantage of the rules to block Irish bills. But they had never dreamed of such a counter offensive, *au fond*, as this which was now launched against them. They watched in impotent fury as valuable time was wasted and useful measures held up for the mere fun of the thing. Comfortable elderly gentlemen as most of them were,

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House, with the exception of poor bewildered Mr. Chaplin, was in convulsions, while Mr. Biggar continued to enlarge on the merits and antiquity of the "good old flail", sinking back at last, with a rapturous expression, into the arms of his colleagues, his task of destruction fulfilled.

But Biggar was too grotesque a comedian to play the part of a Moses. That was reserved for the icy and aristocratic Parnell, who was quick to see the possibilities that lay in the use of this new weapon of obstruction, and who was a born leader of men. In a few years he had risen from being a nervous and tongue-tied recruit—"a bloody fool of a candidate" one of the leaders had called him—to being, first the leader or dictator of the Irish party in Parliament, and afterwards the "Uncrowned King of Ireland". One of the secrets of his power was the inhuman ruthlessness with which it was exercised. Poor Butt, whose life and fortune had been devoted to his country's service, was thrust contemptuously aside to die, a ruined and a broken-hearted man. The decencies of Parliamentary life were trampled under-foot; "the best club in Europe" was degenerating into chaos. The press was scandalized; the immense majority of Parnell's fellow members viewed his conduct with open disgust; John Bull hardened his heart and was less inclined than ever to let the Irish go out of the Union. But Parnell could afford to snap his fingers at English opinion. He had his eyes fixed upon Ireland, and to Ireland the report of his proceedings brought the dawn of a new hope. A patriot had arisen who was capable of putting up a fight against the all-conquering Saxon. The Irish Party, which had hitherto counted for less than nothing, had taken the offensive within the sacred walls of Parliament.

If there was knockabout farce at Westminster, in Ireland there was tragedy. The terrible harvests at

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the end of the seventies had, in England, played havoc with rent-rolls. To Ireland they had brought failure of the potato crop, and starvation that threatened to renew the horrors of the Black Famine. Peasants all over the country found themselves unable to find the means of filling their bellies, much less of paying their rent. The landlords had no mercy. Tenants who could not pay could not expect the privilege of starving beneath a roof. The statistics of eviction tell their own tale. "For the five years", says Herbert Paul, "which ended in 1877, the average number of these processes in each year was five hundred. In 1878 it exceeded seven hundred. In 1879 it was a thousand; and the first half of 1880 exceeded the whole year 1879. So far as appearance could be trusted", comments this English historian, "the landlords were taking advantage of hard times to clear their estates."¹ Certain patriots, notably the peasant-born Michael Davitt, into whose soul had entered the iron of a long and probably unjust sentence of imprisonment, were already beginning to form plans for clearing Ireland's soil of her English garrison. It was with this ultimate object in view that he founded the Land League, for the immediate purpose of sustaining the cause of the tenant farmer. The possibilities of an offensive on the land, as well as in Parliament, were not likely to be lost on Parnell. "It will take an earthquake", he was told, "to settle the land question." The reply was characteristic. "Then we must have an earthquake."²

It was after the election of 1880 that Parnell was called to the leadership of a compact party of 61 Home Rulers. It was soon evident that of all the troubles that had fallen to the share of Gladstone's ministry, the worst was that constituted by the

¹ *A History of Modern England*, Vol. IV, p. 164.

² *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell*, by R. Barry O'Brien, p. 139.

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earthquake in Ireland, which Parnell had desired to see, and which was now fairly in operation. The Land League had taken the law into its own hands, and assumed the power not only to forbid payment of rent, but also to make life intolerable, or extinct, for those who resisted its decrees. The venerable Premier, to be sure, had something more than a pill to cure it. He did sincerely desire to make a fair and generous settlement of this Irish Land Question, and the measure that he brought forward, and carried, for securing the "three F's" demanded by the Land League, to wit, fixity of tenure, fair rent, and freedom of sale, was, considering the state of contemporary opinion, an astonishingly courageous effort to redress the tenant's grievances. But Gladstone's power to deal comprehensively with the land was seriously handicapped by the House of Lords, which on this issue was minded to function quite frankly as a House of Landlords, and which, though it did not dare to persist in its intention to wreck the Land Act, had previously added fuel to the fires of discord by rejecting one providing the tenant with compensation for disturbance.

But no measure that the Government could conceivably have proposed would have had a chance of appeasing Ireland's discontent, so long as the Act of Union remained unrepealed, or the English landlords kept their grip on Irish soil. The situation had got completely out of hand. All over Catholic Ireland the Land League was creating a reign of terror. Centuries of oppression had fostered a cold and ruthless implacability. Not even the animals were spared in a warfare that was the more horrible because it was secret, and masked under the forms of peace. Assassination might be the fate of anyone hardy enough to disregard the League's ukases, and it was not the murderer who would be reprobated, but anyone—even, as in one notorious instance, the

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victim's daughter—who might imperil the murderer's skin by giving information against him. Parnell himself was sincerely opposed to such methods of violence. The way that he proposed was that of complete social ostracism, called from the name of the land-agent to whom it was first applied, the boycott.

Gladstone was sincerely anxious to deal generously with Ireland, but neither he nor his government were prepared to tolerate the methods of the Land League. If it was to be war, open or secret, the challenge would be taken up. The answer to terror was martial law, or, as it was called in Ireland, coercion. It was hopeless to rely on the ordinary forms of law. So far as an Irish jury was concerned, it was as safe to shoot a landlord as a sparrow. Accordingly the unedifying spectacle was presented to the world of a Liberal administration setting aside all the forms of constitutional liberty, and governing by the sword, or rather the rifle. Anyone whom the authorities chose to suspect was liable to be clapped into jail without trial. Even Parnell was lodged for a few months in Kilmainham prison. When asked who would take his place, he replied, ominously, "Captain Moonlight."

For one moment there seemed a gleam of hope, when Parnell was released on the understanding—negotiated through Captain O'Shea, who had only the year before, in the capacity of injured husband, challenged him to a duel—that in consideration of a Bill dealing with arrears of rent, the "Uncrowned King" should call off the No Rent Campaign. But any hopes of peace were shattered by an appalling tragedy. There was a group of nationalist desperadoes calling themselves the Invincibles, who were determined to carry the policy of ruthlessness to lengths from which Parnell himself shrank. The newly appointed Irish Secretary, Lord Frederick

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Cavendish, walked out in the cool of a May evening into Phoenix Park, and joined the Permanent Under-Secretary, Mr. Burke. The Invincibles had been determined, for some time, to make an end of Mr. Burke, and they were waiting for him. It is said that one of them had whiled away the time by watching a polo match. Quite publicly, in the open highway, Mr. Burke was stabbed, and finished off by having his throat cut as he lay on the ground. Lord Frederick was quite unknown to the murderers, but since he tried to go to his companion's aid with his umbrella, he had to be finished off as well. Then the little band of patriots, having done their bit for Ireland and, no doubt, having also enjoyed themselves in their simple way, drove quietly and unmolested off into the dark.

The horror and indignation aroused by this act rendered vain any prospect of conciliation. It might have been argued that death by stabbing is at least no worse than death by starvation, but human nature does not react in that way. One note was struck that was less human than divine. Poor, bereaved Lady Frederick wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, to say that she could give up even her husband, if his death were to work good to his fellow men. When these words were read, by the priest, to a congregation in Connemara, the people fell spontaneously on to their knees. But this appeal for Christian forbearance had no more effect in calming inflamed passions than Edith Cavell's "there must be no hatred or bitterness to anyone". The strong arm must prevail.

Even Parnell's resolution was daunted. That man of ice and iron had not counted on such ruthlessness as this. He even conveyed to Gladstone his willingness to retire from Parliament. But the Invincibles were only applying, with brutal logic, principles to which Parnell—and not Parnell only, but all of the

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new realist school of statesmen throughout Europe—were committed. They were nationalists, with no higher ideal than that of identifying their own with their country's egotism, and playing her hand against the world. The Invincibles had been ready to jeopardize their lives, and they did actually forfeit them. Even the devil has his army of martyrs. And from their own standpoint of devilish patriotism, their deaths are not always in vain. It was the shot fired at Serajevo that caused the dream of a greater Serbia to be fulfilled. We have compared the policy of Parnell with that of Moses, but Pharaoh's resolution was not finally broken till every home in Egypt contained a corpse. The Phoenix Park murders were the greatest of all possible advertisements for Ireland's demands. And when the first fury had subsided, many Englishmen began to ask whether so acute and chronic a nuisance as that constituted by an insurgent Ireland ought not to be ended at almost any cost.

Coercion settled nothing. The equivalent of Newton's third law of motion came into play; to every action from above there was an equal and opposite reaction from below. Short of extermination—which had gone out of fashion since the days of Elizabeth and Cromwell—there is no way of conquering national aspirations by force. Like Poland and Bohemia and Finland, Ireland strained at her bonds, and dreamed of the inevitable hour when they should be frayed to breaking-point—or perhaps cut by some foreign sword. But she was in a better case than any of these countries, because John Bull's honest efforts to reconcile conquest with freedom made it certain that he would one day find it in Ireland's power to confront him with the choice between Home Rule and constitutional deadlock.

That time was rapidly approaching. Gladstone made a desperate effort to retrieve the waning for-

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tunes of his Government by conferring the franchise on the labouring class in the rural districts. This was so far successful that in the general election of 1885 the strange spectacle was witnessed of a Tory success in the boroughs being nullified by the defection of the counties. But Gladstone's Act had applied to Ireland too, and put the power of the franchise completely into the hands of a peasantry now fiercely and solidly united in the national cause. Accordingly Parnell was returned to Parliament at the head of a perfectly disciplined force of 86 voting units. And this force was just enough, when united with the Tories, to hold the balance. Neither party could hold office except by Parnell's leave, and on Parnell's terms.

What was to be done? The Tories were in office, but Home Rule was so directly contrary to all their professed principles that it seemed impossible they could stomach it. Nevertheless their Irish Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, always a wayward colleague, did put out some feelers to Parnell, though it does not seem as if his leader, Lord Salisbury, was ever seriously prepared to toe the line. But now Gladstone had come to the most astonishing decision of his career. He would dish the Tories and cut the Irish knot by a dramatic surrender of the Union. The "Uncrowned King" should king it over a Parliament on College Green, and Gladstone would keep his comfortable majority at Westminster. Parnell, having thus captured the more powerful of the English parties for Home Rule, accepted the concession without emotion and without gratitude, as a first instalment of his country's emancipation. But, of course, he at once, in the capacity he had now assumed as Uncrowned King of England, gave the necessary orders to his following for the dismissal of Her Majesty's Ministers and the recall of Her Majesty's *bête noire*, Gladstone, to carry out, not her orders,

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but those of a potential rebel whom Gladstone himself had described as marching through rapine to the dismemberment of her empire.

Gladstone's new policy, however conveniently for his own purpose its adoption may have been timed, was more in accord with his Liberal principles than the coercion for which his name and authority had stood during the past five years. It may have been as natural for the Tory, Salisbury, to pin his faith to twenty years of firm government, as it had been for George III to deal with the American colonies on the principle that "rebels must be made to obey". But the spectacle of the Prophet of Midlothian applying martial law to a Christian people struggling to be free was too grotesque to be permanent.

If it had been a straight issue between freedom and coercion, the choice, for any Liberal, would have been obvious. But unfortunately it was not a straight issue. We have already seen something of Gladstone's fatal tendency to ignore things in which he did not happen to be interested. As he had ignored the Transvaal in 1880, so, in 1886, he ignored another community of dour Calvinists in the North-East of Ireland, a community fiercely hostile to the Catholic majority that looked to Parnell as its temporal and Leo XIII as its spiritual head. The effect of conferring freedom on the whole of Ireland by the grant of representative institutions would be to bring these Ulster Protestants into what they themselves considered a state of abject slavery to a race they despised. A Parliament in which they were bound to be permanently voted down had no very obvious advantages for them over any other form of tyranny. Their situation would be precisely similar to that of Catholic Ireland under the Union, and every argument put forward for Home Rule applied equally to the Protestant part of Ulster's right to determine its own destinies. Home Rule that included the whole

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of Ireland in its scope was a monstrosity, and ought to have been an obviously, impossible solution of the Irish problem.

It was a supreme opportunity for wise and judicious statesmanship. But what chance of statesmanship was there in the Parliament of 1886? A number of causes had been tending to lower the standards of Parliamentary life. The Caucus principle had now been fairly adopted by both parties, and the word Parliament was tending to become more and more of a misnomer. The House at Westminster had become less a place where questions of national importance were debated on their merits, than a battlefield where disciplined armies contended with votes instead of bullets. This tendency had been incalculably strengthened by the tactics of the Irish Party, which to gain its own national ends, had upset the old conventions and decencies of debate, and compelled the executive to arm itself with constantly increasing powers of reducing discussion to a farce and forcing through measures by sheer dint of lobby-tramping. If England had presented Ireland with the terms "coercion" and "suspect", Ireland retaliated by saddling Parliament with the "gag" and the "guillotine".

The spirit of the new age was very different from that of mid-century Liberalism. Idealism, based on free discussion, was giving place to realism, based upon force. The process of change may have been less advanced in England than on the Continent, but it was palpably at work. Even the staid ranks of the Tory party were affected by it. During the early eighties, four influential young members had deliberately set themselves to liven up Parliamentary procedure by fighting the Party battle *à outrance*, and without any sort of restraint or scruple. The most prominent of them was Lord Randolph Churchill, a wealthy and cynical man about town, scarcely better

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educated than Parnell, who took up politics in the same spirit that others of his class took up sport. The Fourth Party may not have done as much as they imagined for Toryism, to judge at any rate by the results of the '85 election, but they helped on, though with less excuse than Parnell, the work of bringing Parliament into disrepute. Their cruel persecution of Sir Stafford Northcote, their leader in the House, because his ways were not their ways, almost certainly helped to shorten that able and inoffensive gentleman's life. Lord Randolph's cock-sparrow defiance and persistent baiting of Gladstone—"an old man in a hurry" was one of his epithets—was hardly a more edifying spectacle. Among the most unbelievable scandals of modern times was the practical disfranchisement of the Borough of Northampton, by the refusal of Parliament to allow its elected Member, Charles Bradlaugh, either to take his Parliamentary oath, or substitute an affirmation, on the ground that he was an atheist. Lord Randolph's persecuting zeal is only paralleled in the records of cynicism by that of the infidel Bolingbroke against Occasional Conformity and Nonconformist schism. But, as one devout partisan put it, to his fellow members, he supposed they all had a God of some kind.

With a Parliament actuated by such principles it was hopeless to expect that one of the most delicate and difficult questions that had ever confronted British statesmanship would be faced in a statesman-like spirit. By Gladstone's policy, the existence of two nations in Ireland was ignored. The Tories disregarded the existence of even one. The crisis offered a golden opportunity to party tacticians, and the opportunity was joyfully seized. If Gladstone forgot the Protestants, Lord Randolph saw what a winning card their grievance was to play, and with criminal recklessness of consequences he fanned the

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already inflamed passions of the North-East with the slogan, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right."

Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, which was the price of Parnell's support, was duly introduced, and its effect was to split the Liberal party from top to bottom. The intensely conservative aristocracy of the great Whig Houses, headed by Lord Hartington, had long acted as a brake on their leader's progressive activities—which was why the Queen had fought so hard for Lord Hartington as her Prime Minister. It was only natural that these should rally to the maintenance of things as they were, and join their natural allies of the Right. But what decided the issue against Gladstone was the defection of his extreme left wing, headed by Chamberlain. The ex-Mayor of Birmingham was too much a man of the new age ever to get on comfortably with Gladstone. His mind's eye was already turning towards vistas of boundless empire, a Pan-Britannic federation of which Catholic Ireland—and Ulster too—might be members. He was only ready to accept Home Rule as part of such a scheme. Against mere separation he was adamant. So with a courage that he never lacked, he sacrificed what appeared to be the certainty of being the now aged Gladstone's eventual successor in the Liberal leadership, and retired into the wilderness.

It was after midnight, in early June, that Mr. Gladstone, "almost as white", says Morley, "as the flower in his coat", concluded his final appeal for the measure on which he had set his heart. "Ireland stands at your bar", he told the House, "expectant, hopeful, almost suppliant . . . she asks a blessed oblivion of the past, and in that oblivion our interest is deeper even than hers. . . . Think, I beseech you", he pleaded in conclusion, "think well, think wisely, think, not for the moment, but for the years that are to come, before you reject

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this bill." Rejected it was, by a majority of 30, and the constituencies confirmed the verdict by a Unionist majority of 110 over Gladstonians and Irish combined.

But the Irish problem remained further from solution than ever, and though for the moment the English Pharaoh appeared to have triumphed, there were yet other plagues in store for him.

CHAPTER IV

MASS SUGGESTION

It was during the eighties that the achievement of universal education began to make its effects decisively felt among the adult population. Even after the passing of Forster's great Act, in 1870, it took some time to create the necessary machinery for educating all the children. But gradually these difficulties were overcome, and every passing year raised the age limit below which all young men and women would be officially educated. Illiteracy was becoming middle-aged; by the end of the century it would be positively senile.

Except to a few disgruntled dowagers, who could not endure the idea of anything calculated to cause their inferiors to forget their station, it scarcely occurred to anybody to doubt that here was an instance of unalloyed progress. Was it not a scandal that, in a nation calling itself civilized, citizens should be walking the streets to whom the letters on shops and hoardings were as mysterious as Chinese characters, and to whom the morning paper was a white sheet covered with unintelligible markings? And when these illiterates became voters, was it not something worse than a scandal? No doubt it was, but there was another side to the picture. The achievement of compulsory literacy had created an enormously increased opportunity for the arts of mass suggestion as practised by the advertiser, the newspaper proprietor, and the political boss.

A new view of mankind was coming into vogue, the very opposite to that of the mid-century Liberal with his trust in the people and his belief in free discussion.

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Far from worshipping the crowd, the realists of the new age made an exact science of its management. A new technique of psychological compulsion, that depended less upon printed than verbal suggestion, had been applied to politics even before the passing of the Education Act. Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical Mayor of Birmingham, with one or two able associates, had implemented his version of democracy by organizing the voters into a drilled and disciplined army, only instead of calling the organizing body a general staff, it was christened by the American name of Caucus, an invention that was destined to revolutionize political, as that of gunpowder had revolutionized national, war. The free and independent elector was transformed into a voting unit, nor was even his representative, when elected, any more than the obedient tool of his superiors. The Caucus had no more tolerance for liberty of speech or action than the Holy Office.

By the middle of the eighties, the Birmingham model had been adopted, in principle, by each of the two great political parties, and democracy had become a polite name for caucocracy. But Chamberlain, in founding the Caucus, had been playing not for his own hand, but, as he sincerely believed, for those of his country and fellow-citizens. Mass suggestion—outside the field of politics—was seldom applied from any more exalted motive than that of turning a more or less honest penny. The commonest form was that practised by the commercial advertiser, who had already for centuries been plying his conspicuous but undistinguished calling. The Bull and Mouth on the tavern sign-board, the cry of Sweet Lavender echoing through streets of timber-built houses, were the inoffensive forebears of the sky-sign and the landscape-killer. No sooner had the first newsheets begun to make their appearance, than the quack and the merchant employed them in the capacity of megaphones.

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By the middle of the nineteenth century advertising was in full swing ; the walls, the hoardings, even the pavements and bridges of the metropolis, bawled to the passer-by the trader's candid appreciation of his own wares.

The art of applying psychology to commerce was still immature during the seventies. The advertiser of those days lacked the incisiveness and resource that are the fruit of Transatlantic enterprise. There is an old-world ring about such set-piece poems as one advertising a dentifrice in the *Graphic* of 1879, of which the following is a stanza :

I have heard a strange statement, dear Fanny, to-day,
That the reason that teeth do decay
Is traced to some objects that form in the gums,
And eat them in time quite away.
Animalcules, they say, are engendered, that is
If the mouth is not healthy and clean,
And I also have heard to preserve them, the best
Is the fragrant, the sweet Floriline.

The advertiser was the first to profit from the effects of compulsory literacy. His progress was continuous. He had already invaded the realms of art, and in 1885 the great Millais became, by purchase, a propagandist of soap. But though commercial advertisement was of all forms of mass suggestion the most universally pervasive, it had the least immediate effect on the national mentality, though its influence in the long run was probably far from negligible. The habit of accepting uncritically anything, however preposterous on the face of it, that is presented with sufficient emphasis or repetition, is as sure a method as can be imagined of inducing mental helplessness. The dupe of the patent medicine vendor will be equally the dupe of the political or editorial cheapjack. This is not to deny the part played by advertisement as the midwife of commerce. But what is good for the pocket is not necessarily good for the soul, and the

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question of the effects and desirable limits of publicity is worthy of more serious investigation than it has hitherto received.

Though, as time went on and circulation increased, the newspapers and magazines came to be more and more dependent on the rent of their advertisement columns, it was not by frank and open advertisement that the public mind was most powerfully influenced. Long before everybody was capable of reading, the Press had come to be dubbed the Fourth Estate of the Realm. The attitude towards it of the mid-century Liberal is shown by the way in which duties on newspapers and even advertisements were christened Taxes on Knowledge. That knowledge, and even wisdom, were gifts of the printed sheet, was assumed as a matter of course.

Such was the spirit by which at least the more important organs had been inspired. The heads of the Fourth Estate took their responsibilities terribly seriously. There was a dignity, far above that of mere business, that hedged the mid-Victorian editor and his paper. It was written for people with enough leisure and concentration to digest reports of long, set speeches in Parliament, and weigh carefully the pros and cons before pronouncing a verdict. The leaders were weighty and long-drawn-out, without any trumpeting of headlines. Indeed, any open attempt to solicit the attention of the reader would have been severely frowned upon. *The Times* itself, under the proprietorship of the third of a dynasty of John Walters, was not much easier than Bradshaw to find one's way about in. But then *The Times* was of such world-wide authority that it did not need to bother about the niceties of systematic arrangement. It was typically Victorian in its self-important individualism. Of the reigning Walter, a portentous magnate of forbidding manners, a biographer¹ records that "he

¹ J. R. Thursfield, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

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spoke with gravity, as became one who directly or indirectly had made more public opinion than any man of his time . . . and he always regarded his relation to *The Times* as a matter for which he would answer only to his own conscience."

Self-respect, and respect for the reader, were thus the foundations of the best mid-Victorian journalism. But papers like *The Times* commanded a comparatively small public of educated persons. And now a new multitude of potential readers was demanding to be catered for. Vast profits awaited the bold adventurer who could find out what this public wanted, or could be induced to want, with a view to supplying it.

The bright idea first occurred to a certain George Newnes, branch manager in Manchester for a fancy goods business. "It was he", says Sir Max Pemberton, "who first perceived that the Education Acts of the sixties had created a vast public, which had no use for high-brow literature, but were very much in need of light and instructive literature—the kind of people who picked out the 'tit bits' from the ordinary newspapers, and let the rest go hang."¹ Newnes is said to have been first inspired by reading in an evening paper about a runaway engine, started by some children, that had been eventually brought to a standstill. This was a tit-bit. Why not, he asked his wife, a magazine consisting entirely of tit-bits? He had no capital for the adventure, but he had brains enough to raise it by starting, and stunting, a vegetarian restaurant. *Tit Bits* was the title of his magazine which, from its first appearance in 1881, was an overwhelming success. It might equally well have served as a title for the new journalism of which Newnes was the pioneer.

For the essence of the tit bit is that it can be received by the reader without the least necessity for concentration. It has the effect on the mind of a slight and

¹ *Tit Bits Jubilee Book*, p. 115.

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agreeable stimulus. It may even satisfy a certain craving for knowledge, but it is knowledge of the kind that enters at one ear and departs at the other, because if it were to be received into the mind and co-ordinated with other knowledge, the demon concentration would have to be invoked, and that, at all costs, is to be avoided. Among the half-educated, there is an immense demand for casual but exact snippets of information, such as the combined length of all the sewers in England or the number of pints of beer that would fill the dome of St. Paul's. In the same way a few snappy lines about a dancing centenarian in Mexico City or the Wimbledon dowager who devoured her pug may elicit, from the jaded reader, a satisfied "Gaw!" or "My!" on its way to oblivion.

It must not be imagined that the new journalism sprang, helmeted and armed, like Athene, from the brain of Newnes. The *Tit Bits* of the eighties fell a long way short of the sensationalism that was to follow. According to his lights, Newnes was a conscientious and high-principled man. But as he himself admitted to his old schoolfellow Mr. W. T. Stead: "There is one kind of journalism which directs the affairs of nations; it makes and unmakes cabinets, it upsets Governments, builds up Navies and does many other great things . . . it is your journalism. There is another kind of journalism which . . . is content to plod on, year after year, giving wholesome and harmless entertainment to crowds of hard-working people craving for a little fun and amusement. . . . That is my journalism."¹ Newnes did try his hand at daily journalism, but he was quite out of his element, and the experiment was not a success.

It was a year before Newnes launched *Tit Bits* that Stead came up to London to act as assistant editor to

¹ *The Life of W. T. Stead*, by Frederic Whyte, Vol. I, p. 320.

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John Morley on the staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and three years later he succeeded to the editorship. It was he who introduced the new methods into the more serious type of journalism, and thus may be said to have started a veritable revolution in the Fourth Estate. And yet Stead was decidedly more a man of the old age than of the new. He was not, like George Newnes and Alfred Harmsworth, first and foremost a tradesman, out to make a fortune by supplying the most extensive possible market. His business ideas were primitive; he was not greatly interested in the making of money, and he died a comparatively poor man. He was a prophet, an evangelist, a man with a message, or rather a score of messages, and his journal was his pulpit. He resembled Gladstone in being able to lash himself into a fever of infectious enthusiasm for any cause that the spirit moved him to adopt. He anticipated the discovery of Mr. Hearst's secret of journalism—"get excited when the public is excited." Only with Stead, the excitement was perfectly genuine, and usually preceded that of the public. It was his nature to be perpetually excited; it is impossible to conceive of him as reflecting calmly or dispassionately about anything.

On the old codgers of the fifties and sixties, sitting in their clubs beneath the weight of their toppers and heavily digesting the day's news, such methods would have been thrown away. They did not believe in getting excited about anything, except perhaps the deficiencies or delays of the club dinner. But the new public was an excitable public. It had no more desire than Stead himself to ruminate over its news. What it wanted was stimulus, and under the influence of such stimulus it was liable to get out of control and do serious damage.

One of the first things about which Stead, when he had no longer the rationalist Morley to put a curb on

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his emotion, got excited, was the Sudan, and it was largely—though how largely is open to dispute—by dint of his agitation that the Government was induced to send out Gordon, whose spirit was so strangely akin to that of Stead. Next the country was successfully panicked about the state of the Navy, and the effect of Stead's campaign was to secure a considerable addition of ships and expenditure of public money.

But the most famous of all his journalese stunts was associated with the reform of the law relating to sexual vice. For Stead was by upbringing and nature a Puritan, and, as is common with Puritans, the subject of sexual relations excited him more than any other. There was a curious streak of grossness in his composition that justifies the judgment of Mr. Havelock Ellis that but for his stern self-control, he would have been quite a debauched person. With a fascinated horror he set himself to explore and expose the darkest secrets of the underworld. His series of articles in the *Pall Mall* was welcomed not only by ardent reformers like General Booth and George Bernard Shaw, but by all amateurs of the salacious. They evoked a roar of indignation from that great body of respectable persons who could tolerate the festering of any wound provided it were not indecently exposed. Not only England, but the whole civilized world, rang with the fame of Stead's exposures.

He capped all his other performances by staging a drama that constituted a masterpiece of publicity. By way of proving his assertions, he got himself up in the incongruous rôle of Don Juan, purchased a girl of 13 from her parents, got her taken to a house of ill-fame, entered her bedroom, and then, having got her at his mercy, delivered her over, a *virgo intacta*, to the Salvation Army. To his immense delight, the State itself consented to figure in the next act of the drama. Stead was brought before a judge on a

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middle class, of that by Du Maurier you never quite know on which side of the border to place it, or indeed whether there is any definite border at all.

Most of us have indulged in the fascinating occupation of turning over the leaves of old *Punches*, and are consequently familiar with pretty, clever, intriguing, pushing Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns, and her jaded husband with the walrus moustache, who hangs inconspicuously about at the ultra-smart parties he has had to finance. What is Ponsonby? and how has he raised that income above which he is probably living? Not, I think, after the manner of Sir Gorgius Midas, who probably started as a grocer's lad and has worked up to the position of a Lipton or a Whiteley. Ponsonby has the appearance of having been always more or less genteel—he probably hails from one of the less distinguished public schools. He has none of the awful dignity of Sir Pompey Bedell, who is beyond doubt a city merchant, and probably a sheriff or an alderman, with a house in Bayswater—a club acquaintance, though hardly an intimate, of Jolyon Forsyte. On the whole I should be inclined to wager that Ponsonby has made a rather precarious fortune on the Stock Exchange, and that his worried look is at least partly due to the necessity of continual speculation in order to keep pace with his wife's social demands.

One wonders what Matthew Arnold would have made of the de Tomkynses. They were undoubtedly middle class in origin if not in ambition, but anything more different from Mr. Bright and Mr. Roebuck it would have been difficult to imagine. Mr. Bright thought far too much of his status as mill-owner to imagine he could better it by inveigling a Duchess past his doors. But the de Tomkynses had none of the stubborn Philistine pride of the middle-class Radical, the pride that Arnold had satirized. Mrs. de Tomkyns—for Ponsonby's tastes did not matter—

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was a friend of æsthetes and a patroness of virtuosos, and she would as soon have been identified with the great middle class as with Mrs. Warren's profession. Like Sir Thomas More—only substituting the word "class" for "country"—she could have truthfully said that her class was not that from which she came, but that to which she went.

She first appears in the seventies. Earlier, she would not have had a chance of being received—a Duchess of the sixties would as soon have thought of entering into social relations with her milliner. But in the eighties, when Mrs. de Tomkyns is at her zenith, the barriers are no longer rigidly exclusive. Money is beginning to assert its claims to a place in the sun. The task of the climber, though difficult, is by no means hopeless. And thus begins a process of social transformation whose effects, whether we are to judge them good or evil, are certainly of importance. For the great middle class, that had ruled the roost between the first two Reform Bills, was in process of being replaced by something totally different, and indeed the time was foreshadowed when the distinction between "middle" and "upper" would be so far obliterated that to apply the term "middle class" to anyone whatever would be decidedly injudicious.

Whether the bourgeoisie may be deemed to have triumphed must remain a matter of opinion. No doubt the tendency was to establish the right of everyone, with money enough to do so, to be addressed as Esquire and enter the charmed circle of upper-class society. But it is a question whether the newcomers entered as conquerors into a besieged stronghold, or as worshippers admitted to a shrine. The old-fashioned Radical may not have been admitted to the Duke's society, but he was capable of standing up to the Duke, and indeed was apt to take an austere pleasure in defying him and his class. He had his

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own standards, his conventions and respectabilities, that might be Philistine, but were at least his own. Why should he stoop to imitation, when in every department of intellectual and creative activity the bourgeoisie provided the pick of the leaders?

Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns had her own answer to this question. To her, the door of the ducal mansion might have been that guarded by St. Peter, so eager was she to enter in. Ever since the days of Gainsborough and Romney, a glamour of romance had invested aristocratic society in England. What was called snobbery was founded on the belief that the life beautiful was really attainable by those who were received into "Society" or the "County."

There was a romantic faith in the aristocrat as a being superior, physically, intellectually, and culturally, to folk of common clay. Ouida, with her beautiful, ruthless guardsmen, gave the crudest and most popular expression to this belief, but it is voiced in practically all the fashionable fiction of the time, and even George Meredith cannot be acquitted of inventing an upper-class society to reflect his own brilliancy. As for Oscar Wilde, one would imagine from some of his writings that handles were attached to names for the purpose of grinding epigrams out of their owners. So that loving the highest when we see it became much the same thing as loving a lord.

As first one old family estate and then another came into the market, and was bought up by somebody in business, it might have seemed as if the Philistines had conquered the Barbarians. And sometimes the purchaser might indeed be a self-made man with the tough independence of his upbringing. But his heir, who had probably been to Eton or Harrow, and was not fond of hearing Dad referred to as "that old Radical bounder up on the hill who shoots foxes", would be particularly anxious to secure recognition by

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doing and being all that was expected of a gentleman in his position. The "county" was not yet driven to making that recognition cheap—lavish expenditure and rigid conformity were what it exacted. It was easiest of all to enter the charmed circle by the political door. The support of a great landowner or employer of labourer for the party was of such vital importance, that a few dropped bricks or aitches could well be overlooked.

The formation of the Primrose League in 1881 is a landmark in social evolution. The idea may have been suggested by the Young England Movement of forty years before, but the League, with its romantic fellowship of knights and dames, was more definitely aimed at roping the middle class into the Conservative fold. It acted as a continual means of suggestion that there was only one party for ladies and gentlemen, and that a Radical (a term pretty impartially applied to anyone not a Conservative) was an outsider, capable of almost any iniquity, and certainly not the kind of person that anybody could leave cards on. This feeling was greatly strengthened when, following the lead of Lord Hartington, most of the great Whig families broke away from a Liberalism that, under Gladstone's leadership, seemed to be developing dangerously democratic tendencies.

It was in the Home Counties, on which the *nouveaux riches* had made the greatest inroads, that the swing to the right was most pronounced. In outlying districts, such as Devonshire and Cornwall, the balance was more evenly maintained, since families rooted to the soil for many generations had little temptation to achieve social merit by altering their traditional politics.

Thus the fall in the value of land and the coming of democracy had the strange sequel of making the country districts into strongholds of Toryism. The power of the individual magnate was certainly not

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what it had been, but that of the "county" collectively was absolute. One has to have lived in a country district to realize the enormous solemnity attached to such nice points as whether the doctor of a lunatic asylum was on exactly the same footing as the local G.P., whether an athletic fruit-grower who had not quite "arrived" might yet be asked to a mixed hockey match with tea in the house, and on what principles garden parties were to be arranged, one for the real "county", and one for the people, mostly from the local market town, to whom civility had to be shown once a year, but whom Sir Guy and Lady Mumblefever could certainly not be asked to meet.

The competition for advancement was too keen to leave any scope for the old Victorian individualism. There was no arguing with Lady Mumblefever. Either she recognized you, and there was an end of it, or she didn't, and there was an end of you. The least deviation from conformity would settle the business. If for example you were known to harbour humanitarian objections to the sacred ritual of hunting, or—at the time of which we are writing—failed to rent and occupy a family pew, you would be showing the cloven hoof. On the other hand, every country district could show a number of families that had glided silently and humbly into the pale, and kept there by making themselves inconspicuously useful to her Ladyship and her peers. People used to remark of them that they could remember the time when old So-and-so, the pater-familias, was nothing at all.

If the counties were prolific of safe seats for Toryism, so to an even greater extent were those suburban districts known as residential. Here was no county set to dictate the standards, except in those most outlying districts where a few old-established families towered, like ancient oaks, above a mushroom population of city-goers. But the tyranny of genteel standards was all the greater from the fact that the Sinai from which

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the unwritten law was promulgated remained wrapped in clouds.

It was a new way of life that was being trod in these suburbs, a way whose strangeness is only hidden from us because we are accustomed to take it so much as a matter of course. To the average male, his house, or villa, was only, from Monday to Friday, the place to which he retired to sleep, and consequently his women-folk were left to kill the time as best they might until he returned in the evening, fatigued with his day's toil and the foul air of two stuffy train journeys. That time must needs want a lot of killing, since servants were easy to procure and the drudgery of the middle-class housewife was a thing of the early Victorian past.

For these womenfolk life must needs be a perpetual struggle against its own monotony. They had not the resources of their sisters, islanded for six months of the year in Indian hill-stations, with a perpetual round of gaiety and a spice of Platonic adultery to sweeten their leisure. Every mistress of one in a row of villas was a member, and might at any moment become the victim, of an inquisition. For the ordinary woman, with few intellectual resources, there was only one way of expanding her personality. She could at least be genteel. She might not, like Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomykns, be able to establish personal contact with the Olympians of Belgravia. But she could make her home and environment as strenuously Belgravian as she knew how.

Dickens, if he had returned to earth only twenty years after his death, would have failed to recognize the old middle class that he had found so prolific of humour and character. His Scrooges, his Nicklebys, his members of the Pickwick Club, were as extinct as the dodo. Instead, he would have looked down upon an endless, level vista of genteel characters, taken, apparently, at second-hand from fashionable three-decker novels supplied by the circulating libraries.

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These people were perpetually striving after a life that not one in a thousand of them could ever hope to live. In consequence they had none of the old pride of respectability—they would not have been the ladies and gentlemen they were had they been openly proud of belonging to Ealing, or even Surbiton. Certain districts, like Balham and Upper Tooting, that ranked low in the scale of gentility, came to be hardly ever mentioned except with a humorous implication, and an author like Anstey, when he wanted to notify to his readers that he was dealing with rather absurd people, would give them such names as Brondesbury Brown, Harlesden Smith, Kensal Green, and Ladbroke Hill.

There was, in fact, among the new middle class, a profound discontent with a life which, in spite of the appearances that everyone was engaged in keeping up, was felt to be unnatural, lacking as it was in scope and dignity. Where this discontent was subconscious, compensation was sought for in dream and make-believe, partly, as we have seen, in the continual pre-occupation with the doings of "society" and a grown-up version of the nursery game, Lords and Ladies, partly, as we shall see, in a cult of adventure and militarism whose wages might some day be death. Where the revolt was conscious, it would have the effect of providing educated men and women leaders for all sorts of revolutionary movements, political, social, and æsthetic.

CHAPTER VI
WOMEN WHO DID

It is probable that the last three decades of the nineteenth century saw as great a change in the status and psychology of women as had been witnessed in any previous three centuries one could name. We have only to look into that most invaluable mirror of the times constituted by the illustrated press, to realize that the young woman of the *fin-de-siècle* was an utterly different creature from what her mother had been in the mid-century. Whether this change was wholly for the good may perhaps admit of more question than it is prudent, nowadays, to put, but that it was a change, and one going to the very roots of national life, can admit of no question whatever.

The really important thing that had happened was that women—even the youngest—had begun, and were encouraged, to look the world in the face. No doubt the demureness of the mid-Victorian maiden was very largely a pose. But it was a pose that every normal maiden felt it incumbent upon her to adopt. Even her formidable mamma, who may have ruled her husband with a rod of iron, pretended to be a defenceless woman.

But the woman of the nineties is anything but demure. "I met a young girl", says a character in one of Mr. Yeats's plays, "and she had the walk of a queen". That girl might have stood for the figure that every young lady of the nineties aspired to see in her looking-glass. She stood proudly erect with her dress falling in stately folds and trailing like a robe; she regarded would-be swains with an air of

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proud condescension ; her voice had a rich drawl of conscious superiority. Anything more different from the round-faced Floras depicted by Leech it would be hard to imagine. And yet Flora was there, ample and majestic, with a little black bonnet and a black alpaca dress, regarding these upstart children, through her tortoise-shell lorgnettes, with a scrutiny that had in it less of disapproval than of a faintly amused fatalism.

This indefinable change more than compensated for an outward and measurable progress that must, to champions of women's emancipation, have seemed heart-breaking in its slowness and setbacks. As early as the end of the sixties hopes had run high. Votes for women had already come before Parliament, with the most distinguished backing. John Stuart Mill, the mighty colossus who towered above the intellectual world of his day to an extent difficult for us to realize, had lent the full weight of his authority to the cause, and had gone into Parliament as its whole-hearted champion. A powerful agitation was set on foot, particularly in the industrial North. In 1869 the Municipal Franchise was achieved ; in 1870 women were allowed to vote for, and sit on, the newly constituted School Boards. In the same year a Suffrage Bill introduced by Jacob Bright into Parliament passed its second reading, but without being defeated by a fair and square vote, it was shelved by the convenient method of refusing it Parliamentary time—a form of masculine evasion that was to persist for over forty years, and was finally to arouse the militant fury of suffragettes.

Even in the late sixties the agitation for votes had begun to attract a good deal of attention. There is a cartoon¹ depicting a typical gathering of the suffragettes of those times, with their flowing dresses and enormous chignons, and though the accompanying

¹ In *Echoes, Cartoons and Lyrics* (First Series).

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rhymster cannot resist a little good-natured chaff, as for instance :

Faith, it will be a pleasant change,
Instead of male electors' snarlings
Your hustings business to arrange
With the delightful little darlings,

he ends on a note as friendly to the cause as it is hostile to Mill :

And do not think, O democrat !
Their votes will strengthen your authority :
Strong-minded ones, thank Heaven for that,
Are in a very small minority.

Scorning utilitarian chaff,
They'll vote for loyalty, honour, glory :
You'll find the nation's better half
Is far less Radical than Tory.

It is not difficult to guess what were the politics of the bard.

Women were advancing in other directions too. Miss Beale, at Cheltenham College, was trying to adapt the boys' public school system to the education of girls, while Bedford and Girton colleges were providing university training for a select few. Attempts were being made to break down the masculine monopoly of the professions, particularly of medicine. There was a brilliant array of women reformers in the public eye, including Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Lydia Becker, Sophia Jex Blake, Madame Bodichon, and Frances Power Cobbe.

But those who had hoped that the walls of Jericho would fall flat at the first blast of the trumpet were reckoning without their solid buttressing of prejudice, a prejudice by no means confined to men. It behoves us to realize that the Victorian philosophy of sex, though very different from that of our own day, was by no means so abjectly foolish as one would gather from modern writings on the subject. The Victorian

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papa, terrifying and tyrannizing over his meek and submissive wife and family, is unplausible caricature. But it is true that the Victorians believed quite literally in the sanctity of the family union, and were prepared to maintain that sanctity at any cost to individuals. Women, in their eyes, were the special guardians of the family ; their place was consequently in the home, and the early advocates of women's suffrage were frequently greeted with cries bidding them go home and mind the baby.

Woman was the giver of life, she was also the guardian of its refinements and amenities. In consequence, among the middle and upper classes at least, it was designed to keep her out of the hurly-burly of the struggle for existence. Hence the fiction of a delicate, fairy-like creature on whom no wind must be allowed to blow too roughly. Hence too the idea that it was degrading for a lady to go out and earn her own living. It was for her to keep alive those virtues and graces which the sterner sex had no chance of developing. She was gentle, unselfish, a creature of exquisite sensibility. At the same time she had the dangerous and agonizing task of providing the family with fresh members.

For such functions she was specialized, and the Victorians were determined that she should be kept specialized. It was every woman's duty to attract a husband and become the mother of a family. Did she fail in this, she became that despised creature, the old maid. Once she had entered into the bond of union, it was sacrosanct. She has taken her vow at the altar as the soldier takes his at the recruiting depot, for better or for worse, and if under any stress of circumstances she defaults, she is as little deserving of mercy as the deserter on active service. No doubt, where temperaments were incompatible or the husband tyrannous, the wife's powers of endurance might be strained nigh to breaking-point. But even

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so, the message of Victorian society to her was like that of Wellington to a commander who sent him a S.O.S. for reinforcements: "Tell him to die where he stands." Which may appear a heartless attitude, but can hardly be called sentimental. For it was based upon a belief that permanence is an essential condition of the family union, without which none of its advantages can be safeguarded.

And again, in specializing woman for the family, the Victorians believed that they were enabling her to fulfil the function for which God, or nature, had intended her. They did not believe that any good purpose would be served by taking her from the home, and sending her out into the world to compete with men, handicapped, as she was, by her sex. They were more inclined to emphasize the difference between the sexes than to ignore it. If woman must needs work, then let it be work for which her sex specially qualified her, that, for instance, of nurse or governess. Let there be division of labour and not competition between Jack and Jill. The family was the Ark of the Victorian Covenant, and it followed that the noblest work of woman was that which she performed in her capacity of its priestess.

The struggle for women's emancipation may have ostensibly been aimed at the vote or the professions, but essentially it was a revolt against the family, or at any rate the Victorian ideal of the family. "The greatness of woman", as we read in an avowedly propagandist account of the movement, "does not necessarily consist in the meek fulfilment of the functions of a wife and mother".¹

It is possible that the earnest and avowed reformers may have been less influential in the long run than that light-hearted young person to whom we have already had occasion to allude as "the girl of the

¹ *The Emancipation of English Women*, by W. Lyon Blease, p. 142.

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period", the predecessor of the modern "bright young thing". For the earnest reformers, though their achievement made them respected, attracted to themselves a great deal of ridicule and hostility. The idea of a bi-sexual Parliament tickled Mr. Punch's sense of humour even more than that of an Irish Parliament. The "coming woman" came in for no end of chaff, and as a crowning extravagance it was stated that one of her feats would be ballooning to New York. Even *Punch* would not have dared to suggest flying to Australia. It must be confessed that many enthusiastic feminists cut grotesque enough figures with the tailor-made semi-masculine costumes and bobbed hair that they had begun to sport in 1874 or thereabouts. No English lady went quite to the length a Miss Brittain, of Boston, Mass., who actually disputed the right of men to the suffrage, on the ground of their being inferior animals, but it cannot be denied that the zeal of the early reformers was sometimes calculated to defeat its own object, even though they included in their ranks such charming and essentially womanly women as Josephine Butler.

But despite the censures of Mrs. Lynn Linton and Mrs. Grundy, there was the very reverse of hostility towards "the girl of the period" and her charming naughtiness. It was just because she was conscious of having no cause to advance but that of her own enjoyment, that she proved so valuable an ally in the war of the "coming woman" against the taboos guarding the Victorian family. Where others claimed liberties, she took them. And being fashionable herself, she made her liberties fashionable.

The advance, once begun, was continuous. One thing that had rendered it possible was the permanent discarding of the bell-shaped figure associated with the crinoline, which must have constituted an effective veto upon fastness of any kind. There was an

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attempt to bring it back, at the beginning of the eighties, in the form of the "crinoline", but that was practically still-born. In the seventies, the fashion for demureness had quite passed. The attractive girl was no longer round-faced and innocent-eyed, but pert and frivolous. To judge from the drawings of the time, quite an abnormal number of noses seem to have acquired an upward tilt, and their owners a corresponding boldness of self-assertion. After all, it is a human weakness of artists to draw the most attractive girls they can think of.

Young women were also becoming a good deal more physically virile through their participation in athletics. It is now that ladies—as distinct from half-ladies of the Lucy Glitters and Anonyma type—begin to compete seriously with men, and still more with each other, in the hunting-field. This competitive instinct, in fact, was apt to make them into desperate thrusters, and one has heard of four or five women in succession going out of their way to tackle a perfectly unnecessary jump, for no better reason than that the first had done so. A new type of horsey women began to figure in country houses, with hard hats and even harder dispositions, who, as girls, had been proud to undergo the initiation of having their cheeks befouled with still warm blood of a fox—a thing that would have made tender-hearted Flora swoon. By 1875, we hear of women walking with the guns, and five years later they are actually using them, as we gather from a poem that *Punch* puts into the mouth of a gillie :

Wimmen's Rechts is vara weel

Oh, aye !

For hizzies wha've nae hearts to feel.

Exercise of a less sanguinary nature was also becoming popular among the new generation of young women. There was a sudden craze for roller skating

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that, during the winter of 1875-6, acquired the name of "rincomania". How popular were bi-sexual walking tours about this time we have already seen. And in the latter half of the decade, tennis—with the occasional variation of badminton—had arrived, and established itself as the young people's lawn game, the peaceful croquet being abandoned, for the most part, to the seniors. It was tennis of a kind very different from the stern contests of to-day. The ladies held up their skirts with one hand while they wielded the racket with the other. The men played in coats and straw hats—sometimes in bowlers—while stockings and knickerbockers were more common than trousers. Collars and ties were, of course, *de rigueur*, and as late as the early eighties one had heard of a host restraining gentlemen from the indecency of stripping off their coats at his tennis parties.

Strange and even scandalous as it may sound in modern ears, mixed tennis was at first regarded purely in the light of an amusement. There could not, in the nature of things, have been much science, but there was a great deal of excitement and laughter with a strong undercurrent of flirtation. It was a great thing to see how high you could hit the ball into the air. The young ladies certainly thought more of being attractive to their partners than terrible to their opponents.

In the eighties feminine proficiency at tennis was constantly increasing, and though for the majority of women it was still merely a party game, the lady champion was beginning to make a not yet conspicuous appearance. And now golf had begun to claim its fair devotees, and here and there cricket—there was the White Heather Club, for instance, where the game was played with much keenness, and an average of 40 for a season not unknown. All of which is leading up to Gilbert's vision of "the bright and beautiful English girl",

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of eleven stone two,
And five foot ten in her dancing shoe,

so very different from anything her mother had
aspired to be :

To find mock-modesty, please apply
To the conscious blush and the downcast eye.

To pass from play to work, the influx of women into city offices had hardly yet begun, but we have mention in *Punch* of a new commercial phenomenon, the lady with the bag, applying her feminine arts to the pushing of some line of goods. But the majority of educated woman workers went to swell the teaching and nursing professions.

The new spirit was finding expression in literature. George Meredith, in particular, was not only the conscious advocate of a larger freedom for women but—what was more important—he created women fit to be free. His heroines are charming, not because they are calculated to charm men, but for their own sakes. And yet their charm is of a distinctively feminine kind. No one would dream of characterizing Clara Middleton, or Rhoda Fleming, or Diana of the Crossways, as New Women. But they were, in the heroic sense, heroines, mistresses of their souls working out their destinies from within.

Meredith was not of the stuff of which propagandists are made. His reasoned and recondite presentation of the case for "fair ladies in revolt" attracted considerably less attention than the shrill trumpeting of a South African novelist, Miss Olive Schreiner, who, in 1883, went fairly off the deep end—though it would hardly be out of anybody's depth nowadays—with her *Story of a South African Farm*. Lyndall, the heroine, is one of those alarmingly intense and humourless women who were coming into fashion at this time, and is a megaphone through which the authoress orates at her readers. By a cruelly ingenious piece of

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machinery she is provided with a listener in the shape of a youth who is so entirely tongue-tied as to be hardly capable of putting up a dozen words against as many of her paragraphs, and who is credited with such doglike devotion as to remain rooted to the spot, however long she holds forth.

"We are cursed, Waldo," she exclaims—"we", of course, signifying women—"born cursed from the time our mothers bring us into the world until the shrouds are put on us. Do not look at me as though I were talking nonsense. Everything has two sides—the outside that is ridiculous, the inside that is solemn."

And then, for page after page, the solemn inside is exposed for the poor mute's inspection. Marriage, of course, comes in for the worst of the philippic. "A little weeping, a little wheedling, a little self-degradation, a little careful use of our advantages, and then some man will say Come, be my wife. . . . There are men enough; but a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way."

And then rings out her "bitter little silvery laugh", and she bites her little teeth together, as she gathers energy for launching a new torrent of eloquence, culminating in the question, "Do you think if Napoleon had been born a woman, that he would have been content to give small tea-parties and talk small scandal?"

But fortunately Waldo doesn't think, or if he does, affords no verbal sign thereof.

There were several attempts to imitate Miss Schreiner, but Lyndalls are not reproduced to order and we have to wait for ten years for another fictional assault on the Victorian family citadel, fit for comparison with her masterpiece. This time the assailant is a man, Grant Allen, and the book is aptly named, *The Woman Who Did*. It is surely one of the world's

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masterpieces of unconscious humour. The woman in question is even more intense than Lyndall; the author, being a man, is head over ears in love with his Herminia, and makes her perfectly beautiful, pure, noble, and self-sacrificing. She is also a lady of furiously advanced opinions, who has thrown up Girton because her fellow students are more occupied with their tripos subjects than the higher independence of women.

This higher independence, with her, takes the form of free love, and the freer the better. She is courted by a decent young fellow, and the scene of his proposal is certainly unique in the annals of courtship. All goes well to start with:

"It pleases me to hear you call me Herminia. Why should I shrink from admitting it? 'Tis the truth, you know, and the truth shall make us free."

It shall indeed, for the young lady's next speech ends with:

"I am yours this moment. You may do what you would with me."

But the obtuse swain—and there is the less excuse for him since he is over thirty—is tactless enough to ask how soon they may be married. The angel purity—which has not been very apparent, hitherto, to the coarse-minded reader—comes instantly into play:

"At the sound of those unexpected words from such lips as his a flush of shame and horror overspread Herminia's cheek. 'Never!' she cried firmly, drawing away. 'O Alan, what can you mean by it? Don't tell me, after all I've tried to make you feel and understand, you thought I could possibly consent to *marry* you!'"

Gilbert's Lord de Jacob Pillaloo, who

Loves each woman, it is true,
But never marries one,

would have found a kindred spirit in the pure

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Herminia. One need hardly add that the rather scandalized Alan ultimately consents, like a rat without a tail, to do, and do, and do, and joins her in a state of un-nuptial bliss, until, shortly afterwards, he dies, and leaves her with nothing but a martyr's crown and a bastard daughter, who is base enough, on attaining years of discretion, to blame the social handicap of her illegitimacy on to her mother, who thereupon swallows prussic acid, and lies "with hands folded on her breast like some saint in the Middle Ages".

"Not for nothing", adds the author, 'does blind faith vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring glorious the church of the future."

There are cynics who would not hesitate to say that it has sprung already, and that Mr. Aldous Huxley is its first Archbishop.

But a greater blow at the family ideal had been struck, from abroad, by Ibsen. It was in 1889 that his *Doll's House* was produced in England. We who are past the first enthusiasm excited in intellectual circles by the discovery of this new revolutionary genius, are perhaps inclined to question the fairness of Ibsen's implied propaganda, and even to take the part of the poor husband against the almost incredible priggishness of his wife's conduct in abandoning her home and children, on account of his momentary annoyance at discovering that besides being an habitual liar, flirt, and spendthrift, she has for the best reasons committed a forgery the discovery of which threatens him with ruin. But even those who objected most strongly to Ibsen's heroine were drawn into the debate. People began to ask—was family life so sacred after all? Might not the home itself be a whited sepulchre, full of dead men's bones? Could any relationship be consecrated, except by truth and reason? Were not husbands frequently sensual, inept, and inadequate, and was not a woman's first

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duty after all to her own self, her sacred ego? It was perhaps an exaggeration of Mr. Punch that large, middle-aged ladies in Peckham were beginning to go off in four-wheeled "growlers", because they refused to be any longer dolls and dicky-birds, but the seeds planted by Ibsen were alive and destined to bear fruit.

Meanwhile, the prospect of obtaining the vote was more remote than ever, and there seemed no hope of making any serious progress against the dull inertia of masculine prejudice. It was easy enough to persuade even a majority of Members of Parliament to express a polite readiness to support women's suffrage, but always with the mental reservation that it was not practical politics. A more important gain than that of the vote was secured by the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, reinforced by that of 1893,¹ which removed the control of the husband from the disposal of his wife's property. That was, of course, a severe weakening of the compulsory sanctions by which the Victorian family compact had been maintained.

The advance of women towards emancipation, though not sensational, was continuous. It was tending to bring them more directly into competition with men and to replace the older order of domestic relationships by one that could not, as yet, be clearly foreseen.

CHAPTER VII

A TIME OF TRANSITION

It is customary to talk about the Naughty Nineties, the Renaissance of the Nineties, and so forth, but no one, that I am aware of, has ever tried to fasten a label on to the previous decade. Nor, one imagines, would it be too easy a task. For the eighties, though full of interest, by no means lend themselves to obvious generalization. Great things are germinating, but of great achievement there is disappointingly little. Even in material progress, there is no advance to strike the imagination, unless it be Pasteur's discovery of a cure for the ghastly disease of hydrophobia. The electric light is coming into use, though more slowly than has been expected, and mostly for public purposes. The telephone has also got to the stage of providing food for jokes about conversations between Edwin and Angelina. In shipping, the transition from iron to steel construction is being rapidly accomplished. The Ocean Greyhound has come into existence with such beautiful ships as the *City of Paris* and *City of New York* of the Inman Line. The Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic is already being competed for, and in the same record-breaking spirit the expresses of the Great Northern and North Western are racing each other to Edinburgh. More ominously, a new type of warship is coming in, a heavily-plated floating gun-platform propelled by steam alone.

Progress in invention is continuous, and takes place, often, so gradually that even its cumulative effects are apt to pass unperceived. But to the ordinary, un-

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observant man, 1890 cannot have seemed so very different from 1880; except that the time of Dunderays and crinolines was already beginning to seem strangely remote; it was as if, in something less than a generation, a new world had slipped unperceived into existence. Victoria was still on the throne, but the great Victorian Age was already a thing of the past, and we are in the *fin de siècle*, which though it may be Victorian in name, is as different from what we usually associate with the word as a "Trilby hat" from a "stovepipe", or the Jubilee from the Great Exhibition.

The great Victorians had been dropping off very fast during the eighties. Beaconsfield had gone and Darwin; Browning, Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, Bright and Carlyle. Newman had entered upon his ninetieth and last year, and a dark cloud, nevermore to be lifted, had settled upon the mind of Ruskin. Lord Tennyson was still to be seen, a consciously symbolic figure, with flapping cloak and lowering sombrero, pacing the downs above Freshwater, where the old beacon still stood on the site now occupied by his memorial. As for Gladstone, he had now for many years been the Grand Old Man, and was becoming an ancient prodigy, for ever unlocking a seemingly inexhaustible word-hoard, and looking forward to another Midlothian Campaign and another Premiership, to be marked by the crowning achievement of his career—that of a permanent settlement of the relations between England and Ireland. Men who listened to his booming periods reflected, not without awe, that he had heard the guns booming for the news of Waterloo. There were even one or two scattered survivors of that distant day, not forgotten by their country, for did not the Guards turn out to fire a volley over the grave of one veteran who had been maintained for some time at the public expense in Caterham workhouse, while as late as 1894, a certain

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John Stacey, who had once tramped the road from Brussels to Charleroi, now foot-slogged it from Yorkshire to London in the hope of getting a pension even lordlier than the tenpence a day with which the Budget was already burdened on his behalf.

But the greatest symbol of Victorian permanence was of course the Queen herself. Indeed, she had now become wholly a symbol, and hardly a woman at all. From the obscurity of Balmoral she had emerged into a blaze of triumph, such as even the *Roi Soleil* had never enjoyed. Four kings had ridden in her Jubilee procession and three Crown Princes, conspicuous among them her red-bearded son-in-law, more like a hero of the *Nibelungenlied* than a commander of modern armies, resplendent in his white, cuirassier uniform, and showing no sign of the germs of fatal disease multiplying in his system. There was a perfect bevy of potentates of all colours and nationalities, and representatives from various parts of an Empire upon which—as her subjects were just beginning to realize—the sun never set. There were holidays and junketings, the streets blazing with illuminations, the fleet banging away blank ammunition, and soldiers performing more heroic feats of spit and polish than even the Duke of Cambridge's army had ever done before. In Hyde Park, a little girl, representing 30,000 poor children there assembled, gave the Queen a bouquet on which was embroidered, "God bless our Queen, not Queen alone, but Mother, Queen and Friend", and then all the children sang *God save the Queen*, "somewhat", as the new Mother-goddess noted in her diary "out of tune".

There was a perfect orgy of collective self-satisfaction and everybody was engaged in the delightful occupation of comparing the glory of 1887 with the prehistoric darkness of 1837. England had suddenly become self-conscious; she thanked God that she was not as other nations were, nor the present as the

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past had been. The Laureate, borne aloft on a whirlwind of inspiration, appealed to

The Patriot Architect,
You that shape for Eternity

to

Raise a stately memorial,
Something regally gorgeous,
Some Imperial Institute . . .

nor did he, amid his finest frenzy, forget to chant the excellent precept,

Give your gold to the hospital.

It is true that in the last stanza of this Ode he becomes uneasily suspicious that there may be thunders moaning in the distance, spectres moving in the darkness—but this is but a momentary lapse, and the Laureate hastens to assure us that there is really no reason for alarm; the Hand of Light is leading Her Majesty's people, the thunder will duly pass and the spectres vanish according to plan. Such an assurance from such a source must have been highly consoling to any improbable person who still happened to remember our old friend the bard of the *Prophetic Times*, and his now sixteen years' old warning that the "End" was near.

There was certainly never a time when spectres had seemed less formidable than in the eighties. Such as they were, they raised no more hairs than those rollicking ghosts of Gilbert's, with their "grisly grim good-night". In fact, if we want to get back into the atmosphere of that time, we can hardly do better than treat ourselves to a course of Gilbert and Sullivan's Operas. It is the music, the dialogue, of a society that feels itself too secure to be serious or angry or troubled about anything. Even the satire plays harmlessly, like summer lightning by which nothing—not even an æsthete or a peer—is scorched

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or blasted. How amiable a combination is this of Gilbert-Sullivan, and in what admirable taste, compared with that of Aristophanes—let alone of Dean Swift.

The sea of time was closing over the great Victorian Age in ripples of Gilbertian laughter. Gilbert, indeed, retained many of the characteristics of that age, its romanticism, its common sense, more than a little of its sentimentality. But he lacked that fundamental seriousness with which the genuine Victorians took themselves and their ideals. Nothing could have been further removed from the published sentiments of one who was to end up as a Metropolitan "Beak" than Swinburne's passionate assaults on virtue, and yet these were perhaps less telling in the long run than the sheer idiocy of:

Morality, heavenly link,
To thee I'll eternally drink!
I'm awfully fond of that heavenly bond,

and the Low Church Lord, upon His throne, must have exchanged anxious glances with his Consort, Mrs. Grundy, as the strains floated up to them about Sir Macklin, that "priest severe", who

Could in every action show
A sin, and nobody could doubt him.

Gilbert was in no sense "advanced"; his most deliberate attempt at satire was his attack in *Patience* on the æsthetic craze. What makes him so especially the representative man of the eighties is the fact that while he could no longer be serious about the old ideals, he had not the least hankering after a substitute. His laughter wells up from a consciousness of perfect security. It was a safe age, that could see life steadily, and see it whole, from a Gilbertian angle.

Almost equally representative, in his way, was Oscar Wilde, whom a good many people were pleased

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to equate with Bunthorne, the "æsthetic sham" of *Patience*. It was not until the nineties, as Wilde approached the tragic climax of his career, that it was altogether certain that he was something more than an æsthetic and literary sham. It was as a personality that he was famous in the eighties. He had not originated the æsthetic movement, but even when an undergraduate at Oxford, he had instinctively divined that for an ambitious young man it afforded the readiest means of attracting attention to his personality. The middle-class Philistine, far from being the all-powerful tyrant of the mid-century, was already a butt for ridicule. Even in villas culture was becoming fashionable, and good taste, of a sort, the pride of every housewife. The three-volume novels with which these ladies solaced their ample leisure are mildly and discreetly æsthetic—the authoress, or author, takes the attitude of one cultured person addressing another. Bits of italicized French and Italian bestrew the pages. The characters are conducted to the places starred in Baedeker, and made to say the sort of things that Herr Baedeker would doubtless have approved of. And no genteel novel is complete unless the action is hung up fairly frequently for such idyllic stuff as this—taken at random from one of Rhoda Broughton's novels:

"In what life-giving whiffs comes the kindly wind ! Did ever homely-coated bird say such sweet things as does the blackbird from among the cherry-boughs ? and the little vulgar villa garden has grown like that of which Keats spake" . . . and here follow three lines of Keats, before we are reminded that the hero has been standing all this time before his Belinda, waiting one lightest sign from her to lie down at her feet and be trampled on. The appropriate adjective for this sort of thing was, in those days, "sweet".

Oscar Wilde was flying at higher game than unpretentious Miss Broughton, who was no doubt

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content with the handsome income that must have accrued from her steady sales. He aspired to dazzle by his genius, to become the supreme arbiter of modern elegancies. He had all the Irishman's quick wit and instant command of language, backed by the sort of courage that is not too easily distinguishable from impudence. Even as an undergraduate, he made himself the most talked-of person in the University by the extravagance of his æstheticism, and when some beefy Philistines endeavoured to deflate his conceit by dragging him up a hill, he defeated them by languidly inviting their attention to the beauty of the view.

He was a master of the art of advertisement, and he soon became a sort of informal publicity agent for the new æstheticism. This brought him into what was, at first, a friendly rivalry with Whistler, and the two were seen everywhere together at social and artistic gatherings, sharpening their wits on each other's epigrams. But even if Whistler had not been in the habit of quarrelling with everybody, his austere zeal would never have tolerated for long the intrusion into the sacred precincts of his art of "Oscar—the amiable, irresponsible, esurient Oscar—with no more sense of a picture than of the fit of a coat". But by 1886, when Whistler's scorn was first visited upon Wilde, æstheticism had already ceased to be a craze. It was no longer necessary for beauty to fight for her right to exist.

The middle-class Philistine—the Bottles of Arnold and the Podsnap of Dickens—had ceased to be a power in the land. He was essentially a Puritan, and the middle class was beginning to make Charles II's discovery that Puritanism was no religion for a gentleman. The suggestion that you might damn your soul by dalliance with the Muses would hardly have gone down in the drawing-room of Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. If Philistinism was to have any chance

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in Surbiton or Ealing, it must be warranted aristocratic. Accordingly the new type of Philistine, who flourishes in the *fin de siècle*, is not what Arnold would have called a Philistine at all, but a Barbarian, somewhat *déclassé*. There is no question now of art being bad for the soul, but rather of its tendency to cultivate the soul at the expense of the muscles. The objection to the æsthete was not to the strange sins he glorified on paper—not, at any rate, till he insisted on putting these sins into practice—but because he was supposed to be an effeminate, drooping creature, with long hair and flabby muscles, the sort of fellow who would seat himself down in a restaurant, call for a lily in a vase, gaze on it during lunch time, and declare that he was satisfied. The Oxford undergraduates who had ragged Wilde had done so because of his refusal to conform to the public school pattern, and now the sons of Suburbia were going to public schools, or if they had not gone, tried all the harder to cultivate the public school spirit. And the public schools were hardening in the faith that muscle was the only thing that counted, and that intellect was slightly bad form.

There was, indeed, one remarkable, though by no means concerted, attempt to arrest the intellectual rot of the aristocracy. Quite a number of clever young people gravitated together into a loosely compacted set that was nicknamed—though not by its members—the Souls. It included such lights as George Curzon, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Arthur Balfour, George Wyndham, and those two brilliant Tennant sisters, one of whom married a future Colonial Secretary, and the other a future Prime Minister. For a brief space the phenomenon was witnessed of men and women who had ridden themselves tired during the day in pursuit of vermin, assembling in the evening to indulge in intellectual games, very different from the baccarat that crowned the day's pleasure of the Marlborough House Set. But the Souls were too plainly at variance

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with the spirit of their time and class to exert any lasting influence. In a few years the set was broken up and its lights scattered or quenched, and thanks to money, sport, and the public school spirit, the display of intellectual parts in a country house would be almost as inconceivable as that of the more despised parts of the body.

Nothing, however, could rob the British public of its romantic faith in the brilliance of its aristocracy. To judge by the literature and drama of the time, Society was composed entirely of charming and cultured people, who were raised above all mundane anxieties in order that they might trifle elegantly with life in an environment of luxury. Ouida with her ineffable super-guardsmen, Wilde with his epigrammatic lords, were hierophants of the same cult, were performing the same service for its worshippers of translating them from a workaday into an ideal world :

So to the haven they them bring
That they desire to see.

The lordliness of lords was about the one thing that Wilde took really seriously. Like Gilbert, he was representative of his time in his capacity for turning all things to good-humoured ridicule. He could say even of the Holy Bible, that when he thought of the harm that book had done, he despaired of doing anything to equal it. Of the almost holier Victorian cult of work, he remarked that industry was the root of all ugliness, and the condition of perfection idleness. It grieved him to think how many young men had started with perfect profiles, and ended by adopting some useful profession. He praised the art of lying, and affected a sympathetic interest in that of poisoning. In fact, until the crash came, his whole object in life might have been to demonstrate to his age the supreme unimportance of being earnest.

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We regard him now as a tragic figure. But that was not how he appeared in the eighties. He seemed a being of pure sunshine, a social butterfly, but without the sting which Whistler delighted to think of himself as carrying. There was no malice about him. He talked his brilliant nonsense, launched out into preposterous but delightful anecdote, with the sole object of giving pleasure, and thereby achieving distinction. He was no doubt a pure egotist, but that most delightful kind of egotist who lays himself out to be liked. If there was some perverse kink in his nature, a mental disease that was perhaps hereditary, it was not yet suspected. Who could forecast a tragic part for so perfect a comedian as Oscar Wilde?

And yet it was not all comedy in the eighties. If it was a time of laughter, it was also one of cultivated intensity, often for no other apparent object than that of being intense. There were æsthetic women who went about in flowing garments, with curved spines and protruded chins, trying to resemble the women in Rossetti and Burne-Jones pictures. This fashion passed with the æsthetic movement, but there were other things than art about which to be intense. There were the rights—not to speak of the wrongs—of women, and we have seen of what gasping emotion enthusiasts like Olive Schreiner and Grant Allen were capable when this subject was on the tapis. There was also religion—and it is notable that intensity deepened in proportion to the decline of faith.

One of the most striking and intense books of this time is Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, that obtained an appreciative notice from Mr. Gladstone and raised its authoress at once to the pinnacle of fame. Mrs. Ward was related to Matthew Arnold, and the problem she set herself, and her hero, was how to hunt with the infidel hounds and run with the Christian hare, in other words, how to destroy the foundations on which religion had hitherto reposed, and keep the

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superstructure of sweetness and light intact. Robert is an intensely earnest young clergyman, who throws up his living because he cannot stomach the supernatural, and hurls himself with intense enthusiasm into the cult of a God, who is Arnold's Power making for Righteousness, and Christ, another earnest young preacher, who ceased to exist on, or about, Good Friday 33. Robert is keenly interested in the new movement towards social reform, and proclaims his gospel of service to earnest proletarians in the East End. It does him and his creator the greatest credit, but one does not quite see the necessity of enlisting what Matthew Arnold had left of God, and his niece of Christ, in the venture. Any atheist can be a humanitarian. Mrs. Humphry Ward is, like so many of her contemporaries, being intense in default of being definite. But a fog is not improved by intensifying it, though it may have the consoling effect of hiding the precipice from the traveller.

Between Wardian intensity and Wildean laughter there is not so wide a gulf fixed as might be imagined. Both satisfied the same need of evasion. For during the eighties, though there was no obvious change on the surface, the foundations of faith and society were rapidly crumbling. The solemn compromises, which the Victorians had taken for certainties, were ceasing to be sacred. The clergyman of the fifties had taken his stand on the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. Wilde laughed at the Bible, and coupled it with Beer as a formative influence on the English character; Mrs. Ward admitted that it might contain a good many tall stories, but made up for that by saying beautiful, intense things about what, if anything, was left after the critics had been through it. Meanwhile :

The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But swoll'n with wind and the rank mists they draw
Rot inwardly . . .

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Which explains why the most permanent influence of the eighties proved to be that of Thomas Hardy, who had the courage to look the cosmic situation—so far as it was apparent to the men of his time—starkly in the face. What he saw was certainly not food for laughter, nor yet for consolation. There were—only too truly—powers not ourselves, but they no more made for righteousness than the earthquake that destroyed Lisbon or the plague germs that multiplied in Marcus Aurelius. Human heroism consists not in the ability to withstand these forces, but in the refusal, even when crushed, to surrender. It is the courage of the highwayman, who, when the cart has left him dangling, kicks off his shoes in a final gesture of invincibility.

No mere summary account of the eighties can convey an impression of the extraordinary richness and variety of the work that was being accomplished. If there was little of outstanding eminence, there was God's plenty of that which only just fell short of it. I have by me a bound volume of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, from October 1883 to September 1884, and a glance through the table of contents is enough to show what extraordinary opulence of talent there was even in what is apt to seem a rather drab and prosaic time. For poetry—not nearly such a strong team as might have been collected—we have Swinburne, William Morris, Walter Crane, Theodore Watts, Edmund Gosse, and J. H. Shorthouse. The serials are by Henry James in two parts, and Charlotte M. Yonge in twelve, while there are stories by Thomas Hardy, Stanley Weyman, Walter Besant, J. H. Shorthouse, and William Black. Huxley writes on science, and is reinforced on the geological side by Geikie, and on that of natural history by Grant Allen. Robert Louis Stevenson writes on dogs, Andrew Lang on cricket, and F. W. Maitland, the one writer who has ever been able to make jurisprudence as fascinating

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as fiction to the layman, gives an account of the law courts. Another great lawyer still with us, Frederick Pollock, writes on Dartmoor, though not on that particular aspect of it that might be supposed to appeal to the criminologist. Archibald Forbes, prince of war-correspondents, furnishes an apology for Bazaine, besides a sidelight on the still rough and primitive colonial life in New Zealand. A glimpse of a quaint and antique Japan is afforded by H. W. Lucy, the "Toby M.P." of *Punch*; Professor Mahaffy, quitting ancient Greece, describes it as it is in 1884; while the author of *John Halifax Gentleman* conducts us on a tour through Cornwall. Austin Dobson is at his delicate best on old London, and H. D. Traill, the historian of Social England, officiates for Bath. On the literary side we have Henry James writing on Matthew Arnold, and Alfred Ainger on the women of Chaucer, while for art criticism we have Comyns Carr.

Such is the pick of the writing, but the letterpress is not more remarkable than the black and white illustrations, which show the extremely high level at which this art was maintained before the development of photographic reproduction contributed to depress it. Here we have Walter Crane, romanticizing in the Pre-Raphaelite vein, and Randolph Caldecott, bringing Æsop up to date with that humour of his that is so redolent of an unspoilt English countryside. We see Du Maurier, not in the vein of social satire, but of solemn sweetness, illustrating a poem of his own translation on Death as a Friend. We have another *Punch* artist, just coming into fame with his vivid impressions of contemporary life—Harry Furniss. We have several examples of Hugh Thomson, the only illustrator who has ever caught the spirit of Jane Austen; there are nature woodcuts by R. W. Macbeth, and drawings of Bruges by A. Danse, which leave one in amazement that artists of the calibre of

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these two last have not left household names. But as we turn over the pages we realize that there is a wealth of hardly inferior talent on which to draw.

If a man were condemned to a few months with one book on a desert island, he could do worse than load his kitbag with this dingy volume, which I am ashamed to confess lay too long unmarked, except by the dust of years, in an angle of my own library shelves, acting as a support for other books.

What bound magazine of our own day could hold a candle to it? The eighties may have been a time of crumbling foundations and waning ideals, but judge them by what they achieved, short of the very greatest, and who shall dare pronounce an unfavourable verdict?

CHAPTER VIII

THE AWAKENING OF LABOUR

In the early spring of 1883, Karl Marx, according to his own philosophy, ceased to exist. His funeral, in Highgate Cemetery, attracted no particular attention, except among a few people of extreme opinions. The man whose remains were thus obscurely disposed of was destined, though dead, to exercise a power great enough to overturn or imperil the whole fabric of civilized society. Multitudes would make a religion of his doctrines who had never performed the labour of reading his gospel, for, indeed, the Bible or Koran in which he had written it was so voluminously stodgy as to be almost unreadable.

It was not that Marx had introduced a new spirit into the world, but that he had adapted the spirit that had come to prevail in international affairs to the relations between the two great social classes of dividend-holders and wage-earners. He was the Bismarck of the proletariat. He looked for the Socialist millennium as Bismarck had looked for the unity of Germany, and he sought to achieve it by the same means, blood and iron. He believed that the "haves" would never stand and deliver their all to the "have-nots" unless they were forced to do so, and accordingly he looked forward to a ruthless class warfare, without truce or compromise, until the capitalist class, as a class, was wiped out of existence. He believed in neither God nor devil, soul nor immortality; the only motives that counted with him, or, by his version of history, had ever counted, were those of material self-interest.

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No doubt if Marx had never existed, matters would have taken much the same course. For as Gladstone had said of the franchise agitation, the social forces were moving onward in their might and majesty. The spirit of an age will carve its own human channels. It was not to be expected that the working classes would rest content for ever with the privilege of marking their crosses for a Disraeli or a Gladstone. They might, indeed, be inoculated with the team spirit by the party managers, and work off their combative instincts as harmlessly at the polls as they did in the football arena. But sooner or later some of them were bound to ask, "Now we have got the vote, what good is it going to do for us?" and from some quarter the answer was bound to come, as it came in the first of the pamphlets of the Fabian Society, published in 1884: "We live in a competitive society with Capital in the hands of individuals . . . the time approaches when Capital can be made public property . . . the power is in your hands, and chances of using that power are continually within your reach." Or to put it more simply, "You, Bill Smith, are toiling—if you are lucky enough to get a job—for something round about a pound a week. Your neighbour, Mr. William Smythe, who does not toil at all, may be drawing a hundred, or possibly a thousand, of the said pounds in a week, and society guarantees him a proportionate amount of the fruits of your labour. The vote provides a means by which you and your mates can order society at your own sweet collective will. You can, with the assistance of the police, boot Smythe out of his mansion and fit it up for your own holidays; you can collar his bank and share out his dividends. The law shall in future be your law and not Smythe's law. Up, then, and vote!"

William Morris expressed it with lyric frenzy

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when he called upon the rich to hear and tremble, and threatened :

Is it war then ? Will ye perish as the
dry wood in the fire ?

The Victorians of the mid-century had accepted the existing social system as they had accepted the Bible and morals of respectability. Their science of economics embraced a series of highly abstract propositions whose concrete effect was to justify the case of the "haves" against the "have-nots". So long as prosperity was on the increase, there was little serious discontent among the workers. But the slump and agricultural depression that dogged the steps of Lord Beaconsfield's administration gave the social system the most serious jar it had received since the Hungry Forties. And accordingly it is during the eighties that the workers begin to display an uneasy sense that all, for them, is not for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The voice of the agitator is heard in the land, and when the depression is renewed, as it is in the middle of the decade, things happen of an alarming and—some nervous people may think—revolutionary significance.

Drunken with the eloquence of John Burns, a mob of social derelicts, white-faced and ragged, flooded out of Trafalgar Square into the calm precincts of Pall Mall. The clubmen, attracted by the spectacle, thronged to the windows, and regarded the procession with good-natured amusement. Perhaps the amusement was a little too apparent. Stones began to fly ; there was a tinkle of falling glass, a movement backwards, and for the rest of the afternoon indignant comments, in a rather draughty atmosphere, on the state of the country and the police force. For owing to the helpless inefficiency of the authorities, the police were nowhere to be seen, and the mob found the West End appar-

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ently at their mercy. For two hours they drifted about the streets, smashing a certain amount of property, but offering no personal violence. They penetrated as far as South Audley Street, raiding shops, and a lady who witnessed it describes the sudden alarming apparition of a crowd of rough-looking men running up the street, uttering a kind of hoarse roar. At last a police inspector, more capable than his superiors, took charge of the situation and easily drove back the mob when it tried to enter Oxford Street. The sequel was curious, for a fund raised at the Mansion House for relief of the unemployed was promptly doubled.

That was in 1886. In the next year, that of the Jubilee, the spirit of revolutionary violence assumed a form that recalled the days of the Chartist petition. The authorities—for what appeared to them sufficient reasons—announced their intention of forbidding a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square. The organizers of the meeting determined that it should be held in the teeth of the authorities, and a number of processions converged, under the leaden sky of a November day, upon the Square. But there was no unpreparedness this time. There were not only an immense force of police, but also the foot-guards, with bayonets fixed, lining one side of the Square, and Life Guards, with their plumed helmets and glittering cuirasses, threading their way through the sombre masses. The mob had come determined to have its way, and at the entrance of the Strand there was a brief but fierce battle with the police, but for the most part the processions were broken up by police charges before they could get to the scene of action. There was, not unnaturally, some rough work with truncheons, though none with rifles or bayonets, and one unfortunate youth succumbed to his injuries. Considering that the whole affair arose out of an attempt of a vast and organized mob to

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redress its grievances by violence, the only wonder is that it passed off with so few casualties as it did, and when one thinks of Red Sunday at St. Petersburg, the name Bloody Sunday seems a little lacking in sense of proportion. But the funeral of the poor youth was made the occasion for a really magnificent poem by William Morris, who had been in one of the broken-up processions, a dirge to the refrain,

Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all, if they would dusk the day.

But anarchic violence is not to the taste of the British workman, and there was no more need for slaying. A more effective though less sensational development of class warfare was witnessed in the great London dock strike of 1889. Hitherto it had been the skilled artisans, the aristocracy of Labour, who had organized themselves into Trades Unions, but now it was the casual and unskilled labourers, who had daily competed against one another for jobs, who showed a hitherto unsuspected capacity for combined and militant action. In spite of the inconvenience that it caused, their struggle for a lordly sixpence an hour was regarded with sympathy, that expressed itself in the form of loosened purse-strings, even in the city. The men, poor as they were, behaved with a restraint that would have been inconceivable, under similar circumstances, in any other industrial community. The venerable Cardinal Manning, together with the Lord Mayor, was accepted as mediator, and the dispute eventually ended with the docker secure of his tanner.

The most remarkable feature of the new working-class movement was the fact that it derived the pick of its brains from a small, but extremely able group of middle-class allies. It is in the nature of things unlikely that men trained in the factory and workshop can often develop, to their fullest extent, the

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essential qualifications for intellectual leadership, though how completely this initial handicap is sometimes overcome is proved by such born leaders as Mr. J. H. Thomas and Mr. John Burns. It may be asked what possible inducement any middle-class people can have for forwarding a policy so plainly suicidal from their own point of view. It is probable that reason, in the last resort, has very little to do with it. It will appear, when we come to consider the rise of imperialism, that one of the most powerful social influences of our time is the sheer boredom of the suburban population with the highly artificial conditions of its own existence. Somewhere in the back of every villa-dweller's mind is a desire to escape from the villa, either into some mansion of Belgravia, or somewhere East of Suez, or into an order of society where these vaguely unsatisfactory conditions of the present shall be remoulded nearer to the heart's desire.

It was in the winter of 1883-4 that the Fabian Society was founded, and though in 1885 it had only attained a personnel of 40, and never in the course of its existence topped the 4,000 mark, it exercised an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. It gave the earnest man or woman who felt that any order of society would be a welcome change from one of imitative gentility, the chance of promoting a social revolution of not too alarming a kind. For though the first Fabian pamphlet might have earned the approval of Marx himself, the Fabians soon discovered a more practicable way than that of incipient Bolshevism. They accepted the class war and principles of Socialism with the consoling proviso that nothing should be done in a hurry. They took their name from a Roman general who had been called "The Dawdler".

This exactly suited the genius of that remarkable couple who, in conjunction with the dashing free-

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lance, Mr. Bernard Shaw, were the dominating personalities of the Society. Mrs. Sidney Webb was an earnest young lady with whom Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns would have been proud to scrape an acquaintance, and had taken to social reform as an escape not from the pettiness of villadom, but from that very paradise of authentic Society which every daughter of Suburbia desires to see. She and her husband were Socialists, but their Socialism was by no means essential to their joint career. If they had called themselves Tories, or anything but Liberals, it would not have made so vital a difference. Their true work was not to preach a social doctrine, but to make straight a new path of approach to social problems.

Hitherto statesmen and even economists had been content with more or less facile generalizations, and had rarely condescended to get down to hard tacks, and to find out the obscure and complex details of the disease before making the diagnosis and prescribing the cure. What the faith of the Webbs really amounted to was that there were immense and hitherto unrealized opportunities for collective action, if only the job were tackled scientifically. Disraeli, who had the instincts of a social reformer, had long ago spoken of England as being divided into two nations of the rich and the poor. But Disraeli was a romantic, and he had done no more than give a highly coloured and imaginative account of one nation to the other. The Webbs, who were not romantic at all, went to work accumulating, and sorting, and collating endless statistics, not only about the present, but about the past. Like a careful housewife, they devised ways and means for clearing out dusty corners and putting untidy things straight. For an effective Socialist policy, these ways and means were no doubt indispensable. But they would equally serve the purpose of any conscientious

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bureaucrat. Signor Mussolini might do worse than engage Lord and Lady Passfield as permanent economic advisers to his Fascist government.

By the end of the century, people had come to regard social problems from an angle that was hardly approached in the sixties. It is true that there were still economists occupying academic chairs and grinding the wind of abstraction. Everybody, when asked to do so, honoured their authority, but nobody paid the least attention to anything they said, except undergraduates sweating for triposes. Demand might precede supply, or supply demand, or both, as the great Alfred Marshall laid down, act together like a pair of scissors—it was about as important, one way or the other, as the celebrated controversy about the right end to start eating an egg. But it *was* important to know the relative advantages of gas and electricity for municipal supply, or how far it was possible to secure decent conditions for laundry workers in private houses.

By the end of the eighties, Charles Booth, no Socialist, but a shipowner and a Conservative, had embarked on his monumental and detailed survey of Life and Labour in London. And in 1894 the Royal Commission on Labour, after accumulating an immense mass of evidence, published its final report, which forms a sociological landmark in the history of blue-books.

Without some such preparation as this, it is obvious that all talk about Socialism is empty air, and that any attempt to realize the Socialist Utopia could only result in chaos. For the essence of Socialism, as distinct from mere anarchy, consists in an attempt by mankind to take over from Providence or the blind working of competition the task of ordering its own economic destinies. To approach such a task without minute and detailed knowledge would be as if the first casual loafer were taken out of the streets

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and put into the signal-box at Crewe or Willesden with instructions to run it on his own lines for the next two hours. William Morris, that most lovable and naïve of romantics, had written a book called, most appropriately, *News from Nowhere*, in which he described the coming of a social millennium. There is a massacre in Trafalgar Square, a general strike, and then the government—having alienated its own minions—collapses, and the whole country settles joyfully down to a perpetual picnic of shepherds and shepherdesses—all very young and attractive—picturesque craftsmen, and their like. It is all idyllically simple—in Nowhere.

But the Webbs, and the new school of social reformers, were aiming at the gradual transformation of a comparatively anarchic into a minutely ordered industrial society, and they did not underestimate the difficulties of the task. They were making the world possible for Socialism—they were making equally possible an order of society based upon a slavery of human units on a far grander scale than anything dreamed of in ancient Rome. Perhaps, with the coming of the Marxian Kingdom, that and Socialism might turn out to be one and the same thing.

Meanwhile Labour itself had to be rendered fit to govern. This task was being taken in hand by the Trades Unions, whose most important function did not consist in the organizing of industrial warfare, but in the school for collective action that they afforded to the intellectual pick of the working class. The habit of association in local lodges, the spade-work of administration, the wider scope afforded by delegate meetings and the creation of a central secretariat, formed a school in which future class leaders might be trained. Indeed it was a question of whether Labour politics might not come to be financed and dictated, in the long run, by these formidable corporations, that might thereby attain

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to a power in the State overshadowing that of the State itself.

Meanwhile the first, tentative beginnings of an attempt by Labour to capture Parliament were to be seen. There had been two Labour representatives in the Parliament of 1880; in the election of 1885 this number was increased to a dozen, including a champion of agricultural Labour in the person of Joseph Arch. But these members did not yet function as more than a group within the Liberal and Radical Party. The group suffered in the election next summer on Home Rule, two of its most prominent members, Leicester and Arch himself, losing their seats.

It was in 1889, when Karl Marx had been lying for six years in Highgate Cemetery, that a young student, who had been sent down from Kazan University for taking part in political meetings, was allowed to return, and forthwith applied himself to an intensive study of the Master's works. He was afterwards to be known as Lenin.

BOOK IV
THE NINETIES

CHAPTER I
GATHERING CLOUDS

The wonderful century, as it was already beginning to be called, had entered upon its last and—since progress is cumulative—presumably its most wonderful decade. Never in the history of the world had civilized man regarded his prospects with such unquestioning optimism. And of all optimists, the greatest was John Bull. He had taken to regarding himself in the looking-glass, and observing the wonderful way in which he was putting on flesh. Never had there been such expansion—bigger and better everything! It was good to have been born into such an age. The only fly in the ointment was that even this present was but a poor foretaste of what the future was going to be.

Never, even during the twentieth century, has there been such an active consciousness of being up to date as during the nineties. We, with our aeroplanes and our wireless, our jazz and our monkey glands, are not able to recapture that fine, careless rapture of modernity that we associate with the *fin de siècle*. Perhaps the mere fact of its being the end of a century had a little to do with it. For mankind is to some extent the dupe of its own conventions. A century of progress ought, it was instinctively felt, to rise to some wonderful culmination. The end crowns the work, and despite the fact that progress

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was supposed to have a good many thousand centuries to go on progressing in, it seemed appropriate that the last decade of this particular century should have a certain artistic finish, that it should be a time of harvesting the fruits of progress, of realizing and enjoying the wonders of the new world that the machines were making for Man.

Thus the expression "up to date" came to have an almost divine significance. To say a thing was up to date or, alternatively, *fin de siècle*, was the highest praise that it was possible to bestow. Even in art and poetry the rage was all to be ahead of the times, to do something better than anything dreamed of in the past, something worthy of this wonderful brand-new age.

But in England there was a double process of self-suggestion. The nineties were not only the culmination of a century, but also of a reign. The Queen was engaged in what was of all things the most popular at this time, she was breaking a record. Only three of her predecessors had had jubilees. She had outreigned Edward III in the year of her own, 1887; after '93 the only one left in the running was her poor old mad grandfather. And in '97, the year of her Diamond Jubilee, she would be left alone. Her feat was symbolic, for England was also engaged in record breaking—she held the records for Empire, for wealth, for commerce, for sea-power, for the size of her metropolis, for social prosperity. It was no wonder that the achievement of the record reign afforded the excuse for an orgy of self-congratulation that was also, in its way, a world record of collective Coué-ism.

Our old friend of the *Prophetic Times*, if he was still alive, must have felt a little foolish about his warning, twenty years ago, that the end was near. For never had the skies seemed more brilliantly unclouded, never had the barometer pointed so

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steadily to "set fair". A generation would soon have passed since the last war between two great civilized powers, and the peace of Europe—it was true that it was known as the Armed Peace—seemed established more firmly than ever before. There had been some threatening war-clouds not so long ago, when General Boulanger was posturing and swaggering on his black charger before the good citizens of Paris and it was pretty clearly understood that Lord Salisbury would be prepared to turn a Nelson eye to the violation of treaty rights involved in a German sweep through Belgium. There had been a time when tension between Russia and Austria had reached such a pitch that Bismarck had been forced to make public the terms of the Austro-German defensive alliance. But these clouds had drifted harmlessly away, and—what was really extraordinary—the business of partitioning the African Continent was getting itself somehow accomplished by peaceful means. And France had now an Empire to console her for the loss of her two provinces.

It was in the year 1890 that a cartoon of extraordinary pathos and solemnity was drawn by John Tenniel for *Punch*. It represented an aged pilot being dropped from one of those ocean liners that were so conspicuous a triumph of recent progress. The old man, half-way down the ladder, was steadying himself for a moment against the side of the great vessel, while from above, a handsome young man, with an imperial crown on his head, regarded him thoughtfully. The pilot was Bismarck, the skipper who had just got rid of him was Queen Victoria's grandson, the new German Emperor. It is proof of Tenniel's genius that he appears to have intuitively grasped the critical significance of this incident. For indeed, the year 1890 is seen, in the light of events, to have marked the division of the Armed Peace. Before that, under the dominating

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influence of Bismarck's personality, the peace had been not only kept but strengthened. France might chafe as she would at the still unhealed wound in her side, but she was faced with the solid strength of the Triple Alliance, and seemed hopeless of obtaining an ally to join her in so forlorn a hope as a war of revenge on Germany. For the Treaty of Reinsurance with Russia, the crowning triumph of Bismarck's diplomacy, held good, and was coming up that year for renewal.

But the young Emperor was going to steer his own vessel without any assistance from the overbearing old pilot who had as good as skippered his imperial father and grandfather on their own bridge. He was confident of his brilliance, confident too in his Germany. Bismarck's pawky caution had served its turn, but now youth would inspire a policy more in accord with the spirit of the times. An amiable nonentity was installed in the Iron Chancellor's place, but it was the Emperor who was now, as by divine right, in the saddle. And the first effect of the new regime was that Germany—with a gesture of superb carelessness—refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty. Soon the spectacle was witnessed of the proud and reactionary Autocrat of All the Russias putting out feelers for an alliance with the Republic of the Tricolour. Already the shadow of 1914 was beginning to darken over Europe.

But even with France at last provided with a first-class ally, there was no immediate danger to Germany. The Dual Alliance, by itself, was no match for the Triple. Germany could afford, at a pinch, to dispense with Russia, provided that her diplomacy insured her from attack by the remaining great power, England. And this was simple—just a matter of keeping from aggression that was, under the circumstances, suicidal. England was naturally friendly to Germany—the Germans were supposed to be kinsmen; they were

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traditional allies. There seemed no conceivable reason why the millions of orderly, peaceable German peasants and burghers should ever be set on to hate and kill their more or less Anglo-Saxon cousins. Towards restless, sensitive France there was, in spite of the Crimea, a temperamental British antagonism, while the Russian Bear was still supposed to be capable of plotting any villainy. If ever England came off the fence of isolation, nobody doubted that it would be on the German side, and to many it seemed—the sooner the better. A firm understanding between England and the Triple Alliance could have made the peace of the world secure, as long as it lasted. The lives of many, the prosperity of all Englishmen and Germans, and—for that matter—Frenchmen and Russians, would have been secured by such an arrangement.

In reading history, the closer we get to the facts, the more maddening becomes our feeling of helplessness that we cannot have the past over again. There is here nothing dignified enough to be called tragic—the motives are petty, the characters only significant by the power with which some murderous destiny has endowed their most trivial actions. So long as Bismarck is in power, one is conscious of intelligence, however unscrupulous and ruthless, guiding European diplomacy along the perilous paths of the Armed Peace. Now that he is gone, there is no longer even sane selfishness. The neurotic Emperor, with his withered arm and his probably consequent, but certainly obsessive, vanity, would have been an ideal object for treatment by the school of psycho-analytic doctors that was to arise in the coming century. He was at the mercy of his impulses; and his impulses, except perhaps to a doctor so trained, were incalculable. An entourage of nonentities, of charlatans, of sycophants, of perverts, executed and swayed his will. There was

among them the master wire-puller von Holstein, of whom few people in Germany, and hardly any in England, had ever heard—he was Councillor of the Political Bureau of the Foreign Office, and exercised in secret a power greater than that of any statesman . . . it was he who had been so afraid of his enemy Bismarck's possible return to power, and confident of Russia's never joining France, that he had engineered the jettisoning of the Reinsurance Treaty; and now he was so certain that England could never join France and Russia, that he cunningly advised the Kaiser not to accept her offer of alliance unless—as seemed certain if one would only hold out long enough—she would come in as the humble satellite of Germany.

But in the first years of the reign, all the omens seemed favourable. The Emperor was after all half an Englishman; he had a love—that was as genuine as any emotion of his could be—for his venerable grandmother, and his words in public breathed the most cordial friendship for England. Every August, at the Cowes Regatta, the most conspicuous craft was his ungainly, two-funnelled yacht *Hohenzollern*. His racing-cutter, *Meteor*, with himself on board, was seen competing for the Queen's Cup against the Prince of Wales's *Britannia*. The spectators cheered him as heartily as they would have cheered the Australians at Lord's, little dreaming what tremendous issues hung upon the success of these visits, or of the friction and bitterness that were engendered beneath the smiling surface.

For uncle and nephew, Prince and Emperor, were of all people the least fitted by temperament to hit it off together, and neither had the wisdom to realize that their failure to do so might be paid for, ultimately, in millions of lives. No doubt the Emperor, with his vanity, his aggressive tactlessness, and his fundamental unreliability, must have been a sore trial to

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his uncle. But the Kaiser's was a temperament to respond to judicious humouring, particularly on the romantic side, for he was never more happy than when he was acting some romantic part, dressing up in the admiral's uniform, as he called it, of St. Vincent and Nelson, or—if he had only been allowed—kilted and bonneted at the head of a Highland regiment too well disciplined by centuries of Calvinist tradition so much as to grin.

But there was no spark of romance in Albert Edward's composition, nor in that of the Premier, Lord Salisbury. The impulsive, emotional Kaiser found himself baffled and repelled by that same quality that has conduced so much to the misunderstanding of Englishmen abroad, the chilling, but polite, unresponsiveness of the English gentleman. Albert Edward had for long been the pattern and autocrat of gentility—his tact was proverbial, his word law in the little world of Society. And there was a blatancy about the nephew that jarred insufferably on the uncle's exquisitely-trained social sensibilities. It must not be forgotten that the Prince was by sympathy—and almost by adoption—a Parisian. The nephew's Teutonic heaviness of touch must have added not a little to the uncle's irritation.

Unfortunately these two exalted incompatibles gave rein to their mutual antipathy as any private gentlemen might have done under the circumstances. The Kaiser spoke of his uncle as an old peacock, and even twitted him, to his face, with ignorance of soldiering. The Prince was hardly more reticent, for in conversation that was bound to be repeated, he made sarcastic reference to the withered arm, and in 1895 intimated that the Kaiser's presence had made the Regatta so distasteful to him that he probably would not come again. The Kaiser did not come again for the Cowes Week, though his new yacht, *Meteor II*, which he had had specially built to outclass the

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Britannia, accomplished his purpose so well in 1896 that the Prince—though it is hard to condemn the Kaiser's action, even by English standards, as unsportsmanlike—retired from active participation in yacht-racing altogether.

But before this last episode, the chronic irritation had culminated in an explosion that shattered for ever the Anglo-German entente symbolized by the Cowes visits. Dr. Jameson's raid on the Transvaal, disavowed by the British Government, had been launched and failed. Suddenly, without warning, the Kaiser must needs startle the world by a congratulatory telegram to President Kruger couched in terms of studied provocation to England. It is uncertain to this day in what proportion the responsibility for this insane outburst must be shared between the Kaiser and his ministers, or what hand the sinister Holstein may have had in its composition, but its effect was decisive. Things—as Alan Breck would have put it—had been said that could not be passed over. The press of both countries, in the genial spirit of up-to-date nationalism, did everything it could to present the matter in the worst possible light. England—so the *Morning Post* informed her—would never forgive this insult, and the *Saturday Review* actually got as far as *Germania delenda est*.¹ The country found itself suddenly face to face with the prospect of war with Germany, a hitherto unbelievable contingency. A flying squadron was hastily fitted out. But though further provocation was threatened, it was not offered, and the war-cloud dissolved as quickly as it had arisen. Yet the memory of the Kaiser's telegram remained, and there could never again be a question of his figuring at Cowes Week. From that time forth the virus of mutual hatred and distrust began to infect two countries whose plainest interest it was to co-operate

¹ *Edward VII*, by Sidney Lee, Vol. I, p. 723.

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in keeping the peace and forwarding the work of civilization.

Amid all the excitement, the wisest word spoken was by the old Queen. The real greatness of her nature, which had been under eclipse during the period of her Russophobiaic obsession and her tantrums against Gladstone, shone out as clear as when she had restrained the uplifted hand of Germany in 1875, and supported her dying husband, in 1861, in averting the catastrophe of an Anglo-American conflict. Her eldest son, furious, like the rest of his family, with the telegram, appealed to her to give the offender "a good snubbing". But "these sharp cutting answers and remarks", replied the Queen, "only irritate and do harm, which one is sorry for. Passion should be most carefully guarded against. William's faults come from impulsiveness, as well as conceit. Calmness and firmness are the most powerful weapons in such cases."¹ And accordingly she sat down to pen a letter to her grandson in terms of such affectionate sorrow that it elicited an agitated reply, that almost amounted to an apology, and certainly to an impassioned plea for Anglo-German friendship. But the Prince, his biographer informs us, "read his nephew's apologia with impatience". It was this willingness, on both sides, to suspect, if not to believe, the worst, that was henceforth to govern the relations between England and Germany. The Kaiser's overtures were henceforth to arouse, if anything, greater resentment than his openly hostile moods.

¹ Ibid., p. 724. The last volume of the Queen's letters, published as this goes to press, contains the record of an attempt of hers, at this time, to curb the highly profitable nationalist hysteria of the Fourth Estate. "Could you not hint to our respectable papers", she writes to her Prime Minister, "not to write violent articles to excite the people? These newspaper wars often tend to provoke war, which would be too awful." "Would be" has become "has been".

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Unfortunately this spirit was not peculiar to England and Germany. It was a disease that was infecting the whole of civilization, causing the international temperature to rise to a fever heat, with danger of ultimate collapse. The fact was that while everybody was boasting of being up to date, the whole system by which the world was governed was hopelessly, fatally, out of date. With civilization becoming every year more international, with the world drawing together into a single economic unit, the last resort of human wisdom was to set up an uncontrolled anarchy of nations and nationalisms, and to employ all the resources of science to make that anarchy more deadly. Hatred was now engendered by scientific mass-suggestion, commerce was choked by scientific tariffs, "backward peoples" were bled white by scientific exploitation, and the ultimately inevitable suicide of war would be rendered scientifically complete.

So that the best that even a Bismarck could do, by the diplomatic finesse of which he was master, was to maintain an unstable equilibrium, and the worst that the homunculi who succeeded him could do was to hasten a catastrophe that—failing a higher order of wisdom than any dreamed of by the rulers and statesmen of that time—was bound to come sooner or later, and would be worse later than sooner.

CHAPTER II

THE VISION OF EMPIRE

A civilization out of control—that is what had come into being as the result of Man's conquest of nature. It was as if he had provided himself with a powerful motor car, and started it downhill without having discovered how to steer or stop it. To talk of civilized Man ordering his own destinies would have been meaningless, for men were accustomed to limit their unity, and even their thought, by frontiers. All they would do was to go on improving their machines, breaking every conceivable record for size, quantity, and speed, and trusting Progress, which was the new substitute for God, to guide the destiny that they could not command for themselves.

Towards the end of the century each of the leading nations becomes possessed of an irresistible urge to sprawl over as much of the earth's surface as possible. All sorts of reasons are assigned for this tendency, but it was hardly, in the last resort, a matter of reason. Europe flowed over Africa as the water of a burst dam floods over the plains. Society was bursting with its own unconsumed wealth, that took the form of capital hungrily seeking for employment. It was more than any statesman could do to prevent it finding its way to new markets, raw materials, higher dividends. Disraeli had cast a romantic glamour over this business of expansion; Gladstone had tried to call a halt—he had been drawn into the occupation of Egypt as a fishing boat into the maelstrom. Even Bismarck had not been able to oppose his will to the blind lust for colonies. He did not desire a foot more of territory

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for his own "saturated Power" than she had got already, but, realist as he was, he forebore to kick against the pricks and himself launched Germany on an expansionist career. Russia, once the prey of the Golden Horde, was now turning the tables by possessing herself of the vast home-lands of the Tartars. France was pushing forward to conquests of which Napoleon had never dreamed. By the end of the century even peaceful America had planted her foot on the far side of the Pacific, and staked out her claim in the West Indies.

This is not the place to detail the story of British expansion in the last quarter of the century. What most concerns us is the change that is associated with that expansion in the minds of the British people. For the old-fashioned Victorians, though often robustly patriotic, had not the least wish to cover the map with red. That wish had been more felt in the eighteenth century, when colonies were regarded very much in the light of outlying estates, to be run for profit. The loss of the American colonies had effectually damped this old, crude idea of empire. Henceforth the tendency was rather to regard the colonies as resembling those of a Greek city, offshoots of the parent state destined to become entirely separate from her, and, as many people thought, the sooner the better. To the Liberal, independence was a good thing for its own sake; to the old-fashioned Tory, a colony that you could not rule was not worth the trouble and expense of keeping.

To the mid-century Victorian, Empire was a word that had no tendency to arouse any emotional response. About his right little, tight little island he could, on occasion, be robustly patriotic. But he liked to think of England as the champion of freedom and free-institutions. Palmerston, who perfectly represented the patriotism of the average, middle-class voter, posed as a knight-errant championing oppressed peoples all

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over Europe and standing up for the real or fancied rights of every British citizen abroad. Nothing interested him less than the doings of those bearded and rather uncouth individuals with whom the Colonial Secretary was concerned. The Colonies were a dumping-ground for bad characters, a convenient receptacle for failures, a limbo to which the family black sheep could be consigned in default of a lethal chamber. To Dickens they represented that almost undiscovered country to which Mr. Micawber went and from which Abel Magwitch returned. They probably filled no larger place in the minds of his readers.

Every historian will have his answer pat to the question—why did England need colonies? But it is at least as important to know how it was that the individual Englishman came to need these same colonies, not for any considerations of high policy, but in the same instinctive way as the mother needs her child, because their possession—as he deems it—fills a void in his own being. To Dickens and his readers the colonies meant next to nothing; to Mr. Kipling and his readers they counted for at least as much as England herself. Why this change?

It had been the life-work of Dickens to compose a prose epic of English middle-class life. He was able to do this because he and his readers found in this life a source of inexhaustible interest. Mr. Pickwick and his friends are a company of middle-class Philistines turned loose in the England of the thirties, and their adventures have held generations of readers spellbound; Nicholas Nickleby is an ordinary, respectable young fellow sent out into that world to seek his fortune, and he does not need even a plot to make his saga fit to rank, in all but music, with that of Odysseus.

Matthew Arnold and, for that matter, Dickens himself, had dealt mercilessly with the self-satis-

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faction of the British Philistine. But it is at least to be noted that the Philistine was able to stick out his stomach beneath his waistcoat with a glow of contented pride in his class and its way of life. This satisfaction was not destined to last. After the death of Dickens and within the lifetime of Arnold, a silent revolution had taken place. The old Philistia had faded out of date; a new Suburbia had risen in its place, whose inhabitants were anything but satisfied with either their class or the conditions of its existence. There was no longer the glorious variety of the Dickens world, but a genteel sameness, a refined monotony, that was fatal to the old God's plenty of character and incident. It is all to the credit of the black-coated city worker that he was unable complacently to harmonize his life with its conditions. He sought for a way of escape, if it was only a dream way.

We know what that way was for Mrs. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. But what about Ponsonby himself, with his harassed expression and his mournfully dragging moustache? You can see that Society delights not him, that even duchesses leave him cold. What dreams has Ponsonby during the long hours of hanging on the outskirts of his wife's entertainments? Does his mind's eye behold a Ponsonby that might have been, riding slouch-hatted through the bush, with the moustache reinforced by a bristling beard, and his pockets bulging with nuggets, or perhaps beneath the palms, with a hookah at his lips and his arm round . . . but he catches Mrs. Ponsonby's eye, and hastily pours himself out another B. and S.

Ponsonby de Tomkyns was not the only person who felt the need for an escape from the monotony of everyday existence. There were not only office, but machine and factory workers, to whom life for the greater part of the week must have been extremely boring. It was this aspect of modern industrial life

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that had driven William Morris into communism. He contrasted the joyous creativeness of the medieval craftsman with vain repetition imposed on the machine tender. No doubt the contrast was not quite so clear cut as Morris thought it. There is the pride of the driver in his engine, of the chauffeur in his car. But in the main, in the conditions of the *fin de siècle*, Morris was right. The average town worker fed better, was more securely housed, lived more hygienically than his medieval predecessor, but his work was less interesting and his life lacked the old colour and variety. As we shall see, he was constantly trying to compensate for this by the artificial excitement of sport, and the cruder joys of the public house. But he too might harbour in his bosom a craving for adventure, the longing so poignantly expressed in Mr. Kipling's *Mandalay*. He too might have ears to hear the Call of the Blood, and a heart to beat quicker at the thought of membership in a great Imperial race. The Empire might provide an even better excuse for getting excited than Ladas or Aston Villa.

It was only gradually that the desire to escape from the artificial conditions of modern life came to be associated with the Empire. Its first expression took the form of a craving for pure adventure for adventure's sake, without any imperial or even patriotic bias. The author whose genius rose highest on the crest of this wave was Robert Louis Stevenson, who was, significantly enough, like his friend Henley and like Nietzsche, a lifelong invalid, and thus had every reason for taking to himself a dream world of overflowing virility. Stevenson could not only spirit you away from everyday life with John Silver to Treasure Island, or with Alan Breck to the Highland moors and the *Forty-five*, but he was able to take the modern town and transform it into a fairyland. After reading him, you half wondered whether you might not see

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the devilish visage of Hyde beneath the top-hat of the next passer-by, or whether, if you stepped into a tobacconist's, you might not find Prince Florizel of Bohemia behind the counter.

Among the great literary adventurers of this time was Rider Haggard, who had been on the staff of Sir Theophilus Shepstone during the annexation of the Transvaal, and seized on the romantic possibilities that were still latent in the Dark Continent. The city worker rejoiced greatly to dream of discovering King Solomon's mines, and finding strange adventures in lands as yet untouched by civilization. He might have thrilled with a somewhat different emotion had he known the reality of King Leopold's rubber forests and Barney Barnato's diamond fields.

Somewhat later than this, Anthony Hope provided another way of escape from reality, into his land of Ruritania. With consummate art, he introduces us to an aggressively ordinary Englishman in surroundings to match, and suddenly transports him to the throne of a dream kingdom, compounded out of memories of Bismarck, of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, of the kidnapped Prince Alexander of Bulgaria, and of the dynastic intrigues that enlivened Russian court life in the eighteenth century. The ordinary Englishman finds himself entirely competent to deal with the situation; he is—as he probably always secretly thought he would be—more at home in his new job than his old; he proves a much better king than the real one, and had his author been bound by less rigid conventions, would certainly have presented His Majesty with a pair of antlers to wear instead of the borrowed crown. Ruritania became the parent of innumerable daughter nations.

Anthony Hope had merely told the ordinary man that he would acquit himself greatly if he had the opportunity. But Arthur Conan Doyle found a more subtle way of approach. He invited the

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ordinary man to prove his capacities for himself. It was in 1887 that Conan Doyle first thought of improving on an idea of Edgar Allan Poe's, and creating an amateur detective with a superhuman power of analysis and deduction. This master adventurer is cunningly provided with an ordinary man as companion, an ordinary man so infra-humanly stupid as to flatter every reader with the notion that he himself must be possessed of extraordinary detective powers, since he can always see clearly the things that are hidden from Doctor Watson of Baker Street and Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Thus Ponsonby de Tomkyns, if he was still alive and solvent, could not only make his escape into a dream world of such crime as never was on sea or land, but he came into it with all the assurance of a super-detective expert.

It was only when, four years after his first appearance, the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes began to appear in Newnes's new illustrated monthly, the *Strand*, that their fame became world-wide. Henceforth it was magazines of this kind that catered most strenuously for the ordinary city-worker's craving for adventure. Sherlock Holmes was followed by numbers of similar supermen, though none of them were fit to hold a candle to Conan Doyle's hero. There was a wonderful person called Dr. Nikola, whose vast and mysterious powers never seemed to lead him to any particular goal, but in whose company a commonplace young man with a heavy moustache was dragged alive through endless hairbreadth escapes among throat-slitting Chinamen and Tibetan monks. There was Cutcliffe Hyne's Don Q, a hidalgo brigand, endowed with exquisite manners and cruelty, a head like a coot's, and a beak like a vulture's. There were super-criminals as well as super-detectives, men who laid at least a ghost a month, men who successfully contended with vampires and thought nothing of driving a stake through the heart of a

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beautiful young lady. The task of providing an escape from the reality of modern life had, in fact, become a standardized and very paying industry during the last years of the century.

It took a man of outstanding genius to see the possibilities of imparting to this craving for any sort of a dream world a definitely imperial bias. It was in 1887 that a young English journalist in India, called Rudyard Kipling, published his *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and it was soon evident that this was no ordinary story-teller, but the pioneer of a new way in English literature. Whether it was an English way is another question.

What had Mr. Kipling to offer Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkyns and his clerk, more than his fellow creators of adventurous dream worlds? It would be one answer to say that he was a greater genius than any of them, with the doubtful exception of Stevenson. He had not only the gift of holding his reader spell-bound from the first sentence to the last, which—since the days, or rather the nights, of Scheherazade—has been the story-teller's crowning gift, but he was also a poet, some of whose lyrics are among the immortal things of literature, and who, like Burns, was able to speak lyrically to the hearts of quite ordinary people. He also possessed a mastery of detail reinforced by a memory not less phenomenal than that of Macaulay, that rendered every story and poem of his a separate *tour de force*, and his works in general a veritable encyclopædia of curious and exact knowledge.

But that is only part of the truth about Mr. Kipling's boon for Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkyns. He could take that tired soul out of itself and set it under the palm-trees by the Mulmein Pagoda, or out of harm's way in face of the enemy's guns wheeling into line and shaking their bustles like Mrs. Ponsonby and her friends, or again he could conduct him into the

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bowels of a liner in an Atlantic gale, and teach him to overhear what the different mechanical parts were saying to one another. But he did not stop short at showing Ponsonby, and Ponsonby's clerk, these strange new realms and the glory thereof. All these things would he give to them—and they should never know that the gifts were those of a dream. Ponsonby should crown his brows with the hundred-millionth part of a diadem; the clerk should become the minute fraction of an Emperor; both should realize their membership of a great Imperial race.

If Ponsonby had been a well-travelled man, it might have occurred to him that he had heard much the same sort of thing elsewhere. For all over the civilized world there were von Ponsonbys, and du Ponsonbys, and Ivan Stepanovitch Ponsonbowskys, busily engaged in realizing their respective memberships of their own great Imperial races. They too were sons of the Blood, they too were of the greater breed within the Law, and were generously ready to apply what force might be necessary to bring lesser breeds within that charmed circle.

Blood and Iron had been Bismarck's formula; Mr. Kipling's way was one of Blood and Law, but the law was an iron law, the pack law of wolves in the jungle, the Robot law of nicely adjusted machinery, the obedience and discipline of the barracks. It was the exact negation of the old English Common Law, founded as it was upon respect for individual rights and liberties. It was the denial of everything for which the English Liberals had stood, and for which Victorian England had stood, in the great days of the mid-century.

It was the denial not only of the old law, but of the old righteousness. It was not that Mr. Kipling despised morality, but that he was the prophet of another morality of force and obedience, the morality of a chosen people like Israel, of a conquering breed

like that of Rome. It was Antichrist in its implicit denial of meekness, of gentleness, of the law whose fulfilling is love. Mr. Kipling's men are ashamed to show even such feelings as they may possess, and womanly tenderness is completely and significantly absent from his writing—his very few successful female creations are of a virile type. Even his language is ingeniously roughened, with "ho!" and "ha'ye?" and "Gawd".

Ponsonby de Tomkyns and the clerk in his office received the new gospel with gladness. Surbiton delighted not them, nor Balham neither. When they were offered the dominions of the Empire and the glory thereof, even in a dream, they did not boggle at the conditions. What should it profit England if she were to gain the whole world and lose her own soul? There would be statisticians galore, in the coming years, to cast up an account of that profit in £ s. d. But Ponsonby and his clerk—thanks to Mrs. Ponsonby and Ponsonby respectively—had long ceased to call their souls their own. Joyfully they took up the White Man's Burden, lustily they roared the choruses that the music halls provided for them, cheerfully they trooped to the polling booths to renounce Gladstone the Righteous and all his works, and follow the eyeglass and orchid of him who not so long ago had been "Jack Cade", but who was now enshrined in their hearts as Joe.

Mr. Kipling's was, like Disraeli's, a clean and manly conception of Empire, for he was at least enough of a Victorian to be a romantic at heart. If he believed in the Blood, it was not as the vampire or the money-bug believes in it. He did genuinely desire the welfare, if not the freedom, of those subject to the Law. Even the old nine-fifteen to the City trailed clouds of smoke and glory in his mind's eye, but romance did not come up, even to him, with nine and a quarter per cent. *in* the City. He liked to see

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Sergeant What's-his-name drilling Pharaoh, but he had a blind eye for Sir Moses What's-his-name feathering his nest out of Pharaoh's taxes. In spite of all his knowledge of life, his imperial muse inspired him to songs of innocence, and not once to such songs of experience as Blake might have written, and as Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a vastly inferior poet to Mr. Kipling, did write about our occupation of Egypt.

After all, English imperialism, at its worst, was as clean and manly a thing as courage and devoted service could make it. The bard of experience, if he ever arose, would never be able to write of England on such a note as :

King Leopold was in his parlour
Counting out the money . . .

followed by

Ten million natives sent below,
Praise Mammon !

But there was an alternative conception of Empire, not fashionable in the nineties, but which might be destined to outlast that founded on Blood and Law, on force and exploitation. It had been foreshadowed by Disraeli himself in one of his inspired word coinages—“*Imperium et Libertas*”—“Empire and Freedom”. It was the idea of a Commonwealth of Nations, whose only bond was one of the spirit, and whose informing principle that of free co-operation. Such a Commonwealth might be the prelude and pattern to an even wider union, embracing the whole civilized world.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIUMPH OF UNIONISM

The secession of the Liberal Unionists and the emphatic condemnation pronounced by Parliament and the constituencies against Home Rule in 1886 had a shattering effect on the Liberal Party. It also produced a new grouping of political forces whose significance was obscured by the fact that nominally everything remained as before. Much the same thing had happened to Liberalism as had happened to Puritanism at the Restoration. Charles II had pronounced Dissent to be no faith for a gentleman. Queen Victoria had come to hold much the same opinion about Gladstonian Liberalism. And yet at the beginning of her reign her sympathies had been notoriously Whiggish—even to the extent of keeping the Tories out of office for a couple of unnecessary years.

The heads of the great Whig Houses, so long as they remained faithful to the Liberal Party, gave that party a certain *cachet* of aristocratic distinction. What was good enough for Chatsworth or Woburn was good enough for Acacia Villa or even Horseback Hall. There was no reason why a rich man or a great landowner should belong to one party rather than the other. From the Long Parliament to the first Reform Bill, every subversive movement had had aristocratic leaders. Even while they were plundering the common lands and shifting taxation from their own shoulders to those of the people the Whig magnates were eloquent in support of liberty and constitutional principles. They had no idea of these desirable things ever affecting their own pockets or privileges.

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Of late, however, they had been conscious that Mr. Gladstone was stirring up the mob in an unprecedented and highly dangerous fashion. It was not so much what he actually proposed as the spirit he breathed. His championship of liberty was so unrestrained, and his methods so unashamedly demagogic, that politics were ceasing to be the old gentlemanly game. There was already a vague sense of peril ahead, a fear of the consequences if these new millions of voters should be incited to take the law and its making into their own hands. More and more it was coming to be suspected that those who excited class feeling for political purposes were playing with the fires of social revolution. As the Queen wrote to her eldest son, "The mischief Mr. Gladstone does is *incalculable*; instead of *stemming* the current and downward course of Radicalism, which he could do *perfectly*, he *heads and encourages it* and alienates all true Whigs and moderate Liberals from him."¹

The position of the Conservative Party, after it had come into power with the support of the Liberal Unionists, was clear. It was the rallying-point for all those who desired to see the existing framework of society preserved substantially intact. The feeling promoted by the Primrose League, that it was the only party to which any gentleman or patriot could possibly belong, was immensely strengthened. The House of Lords, now continually reinforced by putting the peerage up to sale, was overwhelmingly Unionist. There were still a number of rich men who contributed to the funds of the Liberal Party and looked to it for their reward, but more and more the moneyed interest was tending to identify itself with the seceding Whigs.

And yet it cannot be said that the government of Lord Salisbury stood for a policy of blind reaction. In the all-important matter of social reform, the Tories

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Series II, Vol. III, p. 299.

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had a decidedly more fruitful record than their rivals, whose main efforts had been centred on political reform. The Premier was a Tory of the Tories, but he was also a thorough Englishman in his dislike of abstract principles and determination to get on with the business in hand without bothering about dogmas, Tory or otherwise. Certainly the work of government proceeded, under his auspices, with more smoothness and success than had attended Gladstone's ministry of 1880. Though the expansion of the Empire went rapidly on and the navy was strengthened, the peace was on the whole maintained. A good deal of useful legislation was passed for social betterment, on such varied subjects as housing, sanitation, shop hours, the provision of allotments, the grant of free education, the improvement of factories, and the restraint of sweating, while the Government broke loose from all Tory tradition in transferring the administrative functions of the once all-powerful Justices of the Peace to elected County Councils. The great representative of Tory Democracy, Lord Randolph Churchill, had soon contrived to quarrel with Lord Salisbury, and to the amazement of the whole country, had left the ministry, but the presence of Chamberlain as an ally, though not yet as a colleague, was a continual incentive to a forward social policy.

The problem of Ireland remained as far from solution as ever. Lord Salisbury believed that he could solve it by twenty years of benevolently firm government. But for firm government to have a chance, it would have been necessary to apply it in the good old Roman way, without any nonsense about free institutions. That solid phalanx of Irish members at Westminster was a perpetual reminder that Ireland, which had dictated her terms to Gladstone in 1886, would assuredly sooner or later hold another English administration in the palm of her hand. And even

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Lord Salisbury would never have dreamed of being logical in his firmness, and reducing Ireland—or the Catholic part of it—to the status of a Crown Colony. Nor, even so, would it have been conceivable that the people with the longest and bitterest collective memory—except that of the Jews—upon earth, would have been cured of it by twenty years of alien coercion, however benevolent.

The Liberals were at least true to Liberal principles in declaring for the right of Ireland to govern herself. But they had—no more than the Tories—thought out what those principles logically implied. What guarantee had they that Ireland would freely consent to remain bound by an arrangement that still restricted her freedom in many important respects? Why should they remain loyal at all to the English connection and the English Queen? The tradition of Catholic Ireland was no more than that of Poland, one of loyalty to her conquerors. Most Irishmen were brought up on stories of English oppression—unforgotten memories of the Black Famine, of the Hessians and Yeomanry in 1798, of the penal laws, of Drogheda, of “Hell or Connaught”. If an Irish Parliament, freely elected, should declare for independence—would Liberalism be prepared to stamp out that independence by force of arms?

And again, what was this Ireland to which it was proposed to grant freedom? If it had been just a nation, the logical application of Liberal principles would have been clear, whether or not it had been practical politics. But the Irish Nationalists would be content with no measure of freedom that did not include the whole of Ireland, and by nothing short of armed conquest could such “freedom” be conferred on the Protestant North-East. This opposition of two impossible policies revealed the utter inadequacy, to modern conditions, of Parliamentary institutions inherited from an age of cruder requirements. There

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was, in literal truth, no conceivable way of escape, under the prescribed conditions, from ultimate deadlock and the substitution of violence for policy. There was not even the possibility of a loyal party man imparting wisdom to his rhetoric on the subject.

Meanwhile the Conservative Unionists had six years in which to apply their nostrum of a firm policy. This was done under the auspices of Lord Salisbury's philosophic nephew, Arthur Balfour, who reduced Ireland to some semblance of quiescence, but came no nearer to securing her contentment or loyalty under the Union. Meanwhile a disaster—which did not in the least, however, alter the essentials of the situation—had overtaken the Irish cause. Parnell had fallen, and in his fall had split the party. He had immensely gained in prestige by the attempt of no less a newspaper than *The Times* to saddle him with the guilt of countenancing murder, on the strength of some alleged letters of his that were proved to be forgeries. But his triumph was shortlived, for in the same year, 1890, in which the Commission appointed to investigate the charges against him issued its report, he was convicted, in the Divorce Court, of having violated the taboo on illicit sexual relationships. That Ireland should cast off her patriot leader who had brought her in sight of the Promised Land, because a love affair of his, which had long been suspected, had come to the light of day, might well have seemed beyond the limits of human absurdity. But the Catholic Church was adamant on questions of sex, and Gladstone, who for years had turned a Nelson eye to Parnell's liberties with the Decalogue, had his conscience roused into violent action by publicity. Parnell was hounded into a premature grave, and even his death did not prevent Parnellite and anti-Parnellite candidates from fighting each other for constituencies all over Catholic Ireland.

It was sensational, it was tragic, but it had no more than a personal significance. Politically, Ireland

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stood exactly where she had stood before Parnell's fall. She had her phalanx of members at Westminster, who, even if they fought among themselves in the good old Donnybrook way, could be trusted to unite when it was a question of squeezing or coercing John Bull. It amounted to this : so long as there was a majority of a hundred or more of one English party over the other, the most that the Irishmen could do was to make themselves a thorough nuisance. But if that majority dropped below an odd 85, they became the tail that wagged the Parliamentary dog.

This is what happened when Lord Salisbury went to the country in 1892. His government had done as well as could possibly have been expected of it, but the swing of the electoral pendulum came into play, and the Conservative Unionists found themselves in a reduced, but still substantial, English majority, and a smaller, but definite, British and Irish-Protestant majority of 41. When however the Nationalist vote, which was frankly hostile to England, was thrown into the scale, there was a majority against them of 41. But that majority was only conditional on the Liberals consenting to force through a Home Rule Bill whether England approved of it or not. And they were precluded from any statesmanlike or truly Liberal measure, because the sacrifice of the Protestants was a *sine qua non* of Nationalist support.

The Liberal Party was, at this time, by no means sure of its own principles. Gladstone, whose tendency to concentrate on the subject that immediately interested him had strengthened with advancing years, had ceased to think much about anything but his crusade for Home Rule. But his followers, with the Whig brake taken off, were conscious that Liberalism ought to stand for democratic progress. The tendency of the middle class to join the upper in the Tory fold was becoming even more pronounced, and it was evident that a counterpoise must be sought in the support of the

newly enfranchised masses. But that support was not to be obtained from the sort of progressiveness for which the old-fashioned Radicals had stood, and which had comprised free trade, free competition, and a free hand for the capitalist. The possibilities of political reform had dwindled with every fresh achievement. What the working class wanted was not political but social reform. Not more than an insignificant fraction of it was as yet infected with the teachings of Marx and Henry George, but what, after all, was the use of commanding the State if it could do nothing for you? The working man was seldom a theorist, but he would have liked to see more of the good things of life come his way, and he would be prepared to support the politicians who would be most likely to deliver him such goods.

What were the Liberals going to do about it? Were they to cut loose from their traditions and embark upon a programme of social reform calculated to outbid anything the Tories could, or would, offer? But the Liberal politicians were mostly rich or comfortably-off gentlemen, steeped in the tradition of Victorian individualism. It was inconceivable that Gladstone would ever have countenanced any proposal remotely savouring of Socialism. But then, if the Liberals could not compete with the Tories as the guardians of security, and would not outbid them as champions of progress, was it not possible—nay, certain—that they would eventually be outbidden themselves from the left? The workers might end by choosing representatives of their own class, inspired by their own ideals. The few Labour members who had so far been elected were, indeed, content to range themselves humbly on the left wing of the Liberal array—but signs were already apparent that workers of advanced views were hankering after completely independent representatives. In 1888 a Scottish Labour Party was formed with a hair-raising pro-

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gramme that included an eight hours' day, nationalization of land and minerals, a steeply graduated income tax, not to speak of Home Rule all round, disestablishment of the Church, and abolition of the House of Lords.

The Liberals felt they had got to do something, though they were at a loss what to do. Accordingly, in 1891, they adopted, at Newcastle, an extraordinary patchwork programme, on the principle of giving what an actor might have called a bit of fat to each section of their supporters. They would disestablish the Church, not of England, but of Wales, and throw in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland as a make-weight. They would reform a House of Lords that was now incurably hostile to themselves; they would give Little Pedlington its own Parish Council; and since something must be done for the working man, they would cure his drunken habits by making it unlawful for him to drink his glass of beer in any district where a sufficient teetotal majority could be whipped up. Herbert Paul, himself a Liberal historian, gives it as his opinion that there have never been two more disastrous days in the history of his party than those on which this programme was adopted.

When Parliament met after the election of 1892, a scene was enacted fit to scandalize even those members who were inured to the antics of the Irishmen. There was a triumphal progress, headed by a brass band, to escort to the House a man of leonine appearance, shamelessly attired in cloth cap and tweeds. If he had arrived naked, he could hardly have created a greater sensation. It was Independent Labour entering the House in the person of Keir Hardie, who had been a messenger boy at the age of seven, and started on his career as a miner at that of ten. He had been Chairman of that most advanced Scottish Labour Party, and still held to its principles.

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But legislators soon had other things to think about than Mr. Hardie's sacrilege. For the second time the Irish threw a Conservative Government out of office, and Gladstone, now Prime Minister at the age of 83, proceeded to honour his bond and introduce a second Home Rule Bill. The whole of an exceptionally long and bitter session, that of 1893, was occupied in what everybody, except Gladstone himself, must have realized to have been sheer waste of time. That an almost solidly Unionist Second Chamber would ever consent to a great constitutional change being forced through in this way was inconceivable. And yet Gladstone, with his flashing eye undimmed and his eloquence as splendid as ever, continued for night after night to dominate the House, while the Opposition exhausted every device to delay and obstruct progress. In the course of the proceedings the measure was so amended that the advantage to England promised by the exclusion of the Irish Party from Parliament was cancelled. Ireland was to have her own Parliament ; she was also, except when a very large majority resulted from a General Election, to continue to dominate the English Parliament. The Protestants were to be presented with the choice—about which it was now apparent they would not hesitate—between submission and rebellion. As the summer waned towards autumn, feeling rose higher and higher. It was evident that Gladstone had found almost his debating match in the same Joseph Chamberlain, with his head like a spear and his intrusive nose, who had once been the rising hope of the stern, unbending Radicals. Chamberlain's Whistlerian capacity for infuriating his opponents led at last to a veritable riot on the floor of the House—cries of "Judas !" the exchange of blows, and the horror of Queen Victoria, who of course debited it to Gladstone. But the longest farce must draw to an end, and after 82 days of sound and fury signifying nothing, the Third Read-

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ing was passed by a majority of 34, and a minority, as far as England and Wales were concerned, of 48.

At last came the turn of the Lords. Tenniel hit off the situation very happily when he drew a picture of the unhappy Bill, as Little Billee, standing on the deck of a ship between a Gorging Jack of Salisbury and a Guzzling Jimmy of Devonshire,¹ who, knife in hand, were saying

“O Bill, we’re going to kill and eat you,
So undo the button of your chemie.”

Indeed the Upper House was roused as it had never been since the Attainder of Strafford. It was the beginning of the partridge-shooting season, the grouse moors of the North were glorious with heather, and yet the hereditary legislators could for once suspend even these delights for the dull privilege of vetoing legislation. By the enormous majority of 378, the Bill was hurled out.

Gladstone, who was desperately in earnest about his Bill, would have gone to the country at once on the issue of the Peers versus the People. But his colleagues were only too glad to let the matter drop. Parnell, if he had been alive, might have insisted on the appeal being made, but there was no strength of leadership among the colleagues who had hounded Parnell to his doom. And the Liberals had an uneasy consciousness that on this occasion the Peers represented the People decidedly better than the Commons. The last thing they wished to do was to put the matter to the test of the ballot.

The Peers had won a brilliant—an almost too brilliant a victory. For it filled them, as a body, with that kind of insolent pride that the Greeks called “*hubris*”. They were no longer content to be bound by the unwritten law of the Constitution that relegated their House, on vital issues of policy, to the

¹ Lord Hartington had now succeeded to his father’s title.

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position of sleeping partner. Like the Roman politicians of the century that preceded the fall of the Republic, they were determined to play the skin game for all it was worth. Henceforth the Upper Chamber was, to all intents and purposes, an annexe of the Conservative Central Office. Liberal Bills were ruthlessly mutilated or destroyed. It was only as part of the Budget that the Liberals could hope to pass any controversial legislation, and even this exception might not always be conceded. All this was thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of Machiavellian realism that had come to rule the domestic as well as the foreign politics of the civilized world.

For the present, however, the triumph of the Lords was complete. The Liberal Government, having publicly fought shy of accepting so defiant a challenge, could only accumulate discredit upon itself with every month that it remained in office. Gladstone, a crusader forsaken by his followers, made an impressive retirement from public life, to the undisguised joy of the mistress he had served for so many years of unrequited devotion. His place was taken by Lord Rosebery, a connection by marriage with the Rothschilds, a convinced imperialist of vast wealth and considerable attainments, who had somehow failed to change sides with Lord Hartington and the other Whig magnates, and was, not unnaturally, the choice of Queen Victoria, who could now at last breathe comparatively freely with a Liberal Premier in office. But so pronounced a champion of the Right commanded no loyalty in his party, and less than none among his Nationalist allies, since he expressed the opinion—which obviously fully vindicated the action of the Lords—that there could be no Home Rule without the consent of the “predominant partner” England.

The Government was now universally regarded as

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moribund, and the Lords treated it and its measures with open contempt, though the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, succeeded in raising the Death Duties in a manner highly distressing to the owners of landed estates. At length, in the summer of 1895, a snap division on a War Office vote gave the Liberals what was probably a welcome excuse for laying down the burden of office. Lord Salisbury promptly formed a strong government which now included the Duke of Devonshire, Chamberlain, and other Liberal Unionists. In the election that immediately followed the Liberals were not only defeated, but overwhelmed, the Unionist majority over all parties combined being 150—a triumph of which even Disraeli would never have dared to dream. Liberalism had virtually declared its own temporary bankruptcy; Labour had not yet arrived, and the field was clear for a policy of loyalty to the Throne and established institutions, of cautious progress towards social betterment, of a United Kingdom and an expanding Empire.

CHAPTER IV

GILDED LEISURE

Anything less Victorian, in the sense the word is generally used, than the last decade of the century, it would be difficult to imagine. The tempo of life had been speeded up out of all recognition since the sixties, and the coming of the motor-car merely gave outward and visible form to an inward and spiritual, or, more accurately, nervous change. Already it was becoming the fashion to make merry over the pomposity of those whiskered old boys in stove-pipe hats and dowagers in crinolines who had lorded it in the days of Albert the Good.

Society had utterly changed in the course of a generation. It was no longer that closed circle of the sixties. The *nouveaux riches* had been arriving, year after year, not single spies, but in battalions. The economic bottom of the old exclusiveness had been knocked out. The great landed estates had never emerged from the depression that the bad harvests of the seventies had begun, and the importation, on a vast scale, of agricultural produce had perpetuated. As the opportunities for making money on the land had diminished, those of doing so by commerce and speculation had increased. And now Belgravia was crowded with new arrivals to whom money was a romance and a key to unlock all pleasures.

In an age in which psychology had so signally failed to keep pace with the advance of other sciences, it was never suspected that it could be anything but simple to turn money into pleasure. Sir Gorgius Midas had retired from business with a fortune—he had only to

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spend the money at his own free will to be, in the words of a popular song of this time,

A splendid millionaire
Without a single care.

Which of course had a certain element of truth in it, for undoubtedly Dives was freed from a good many harassing and sordid cares that afflicted Lazarus, and from which, in this world, Lazarus derived no sort of consolation, spiritual or otherwise.

But once he had contrived to feed and house himself in comfort, Dives began to find that the business of enjoying money was less in his line than that of making it. He could, of course, be like that other millionaire of Mr. Belloc's, who

sat at table,
And ate like this as long as he was able,

but even that had its inconveniences—the gentleman in question is reported to have died of gout—and what covers was Dives then to draw in his hunt for pleasure, or the progeny of Dives, launched on the world with enormous allowances and nothing to do but spend them? If they went to the survivors of the old, Victorian aristocracy for guidance, they would find that these portentous beings had bothered far less about pleasure, or even elementary comfort, than the dignity that they considered proper to their order. A nobleman's way of life was often Spartan in its simplicity, and a house party was an affair of rigidly enforced punctuality and perpetual tenterhooks. Bathrooms were exceptional, reading was done by the dim light of candles. In one ancient Welsh mansion, the family used to sit in the fifteenth-century hall, with its minstrels' gallery and figures in armour, and when, in winter, the front door was opened for the entrance of a visitor, in would pour an icy blast, often accompanied by snow. Of a Kentish nobleman, it is told that he shortened his life by the rather embarrassing habit of dressing at all

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seasons on a sort of open-air platform in front of his room, and prolonging the process by reading his Bible.

Long before the nineties this sort of joyless formality had been going out of fashion. One of its last upholders was the Queen herself. Her court was to the last an abode of little ease and aristocratic exclusiveness. But the Prince of Wales had from the first committed himself to the pursuit of pleasure without sacrifice of dignity, and in spite of his mother's disapproval and the headshakings of the old-fashioned and Puritanical, the spirit of the time was working for him. It is idle to pretend that the proceedings of the Marlborough House set had been regarded with anything like universal approval. But the largely middle-class respectability to which these proceedings were obnoxious was rapidly on the wane, and with the new suburbans the example of the Prince had more weight than the fear of the Lord.

In 1890, the Prince's popularity was put to a supreme test. The whole country was thrilled with delighted horror at his second appearance in the witness box, this time in connection with one of the most sensational scandals on the record of Society. In the previous autumn the Prince had been staying with one of his rich friends, a shipowner called Wilson, for the Doncaster races. The house party had amused itself in the evening by playing at the Prince's favourite game of baccarat. Among the players was a Colonel of the Scots Guards, and this distinguished officer was accused by five of his fellow players and guests, who had constituted themselves an informal committee of amateur detectives, of having imparted a new and unorthodox element of skill into the game by surreptitiously increasing or withdrawing his stake. The matter had been referred to the Prince, and he had exacted from the Colonel a written undertaking never to play cards again, on the honourable understanding that none of the Five

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should ever mention the matter. But one of them must have let the cat out of the bag, for the story got about; the Colonel was compelled to take action, though his previous undertaking was fatal to any chance he might have had of success.

The unfortunate Prince was the object of a perfect storm of censure. The whole Puritan feeling of the country was mobilized against him. The worthy Mr. Stead made an agonized computation of the number of petitions that had gone up in vain to Almighty God on behalf of Albert Edward Prince of Wales, though this would seem to have tended less to prove the wickedness of baccarat than the inefficacy of prayer. If all this had happened twenty years before, it might have involved serious consequences to the dynasty. But in this more tolerant time, the storm soon spent its force, and was succeeded by a reaction in the Prince's favour. Paradoxical as it may seem, we may date from this Tranby Croft affair the period of the Prince's final and almost unqualified popularity. In the nineties, there was no more satire about "The coming K——", or talk of a coming Republic. If Queen Victoria had been apotheosized as a mother-goddess, awful and aloof, the Prince had taken the place of one of those jolly, familiar gods, who, if not the most exalted in pagan religions, are certainly the most popular. He was Ganesh, he was Ho-Tei, he was the universal uncle. His smile, his cigar, even his stoutness—did not one great journal confide to the world his nickname of "Tum-tum"?—all contributed to the impression of good fellowship. The Music Hall played its part. To cite one typical song, in which the singer dreams that the Albert Hall is turned into a public-house:

The Prince of Wales was chairman, of course he opened
the ball,
And sang the chorus of every song at the concert at
Albert Hall,

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being the sort of thing the Prince of popular legend would do. The cult had its phallic aspect, many of its most loyal adherents treating the Heir to the Throne as a butt for bawdy witticisms, some of which even found their way into the sporting press.

It was this largely imaginary Prince whose example the pleasure-loving, plutocratic society of the nineties delighted to follow as best it might. The Prince was regarded as a man of pleasure—for the serious side of him was not yet appreciated. He furnished the model for countless men about town—it was in fact the hey-day of such men, very correctly dressed, and leading an idle, often a parasitic existence, with a valet, and rooms at some such select location as the Albany.

Looking back on this time, one is struck by the almost incredible amount of leisure enjoyed by nearly all women and a great many men of the upper class. The description given by an advanced young lady, in *The Dolly Dialogues*, of poor Mr. Carter, the "I" of the story, is typical: "Nearly 40 . . . estate in the country. He never goes there except for a few days' shooting. He lives in town . . . he passes an absolutely vacant existence in a round of empty gaiety . . . if you want him you must look on a racecourse or at a tailor's, or in some fashionable woman's boudoir." That is exactly the impression you get from the fashionable drama of the time, particularly that of Mr. Pinero, of Henry Arthur Jones, and Oscar Wilde. We must make a certain allowance for the fact that the dramatist has to create the sort of dream world to which his readers most ardently want to be transported, but even so, that world has to be created with some regard for plausibility. And the impression one gets of Society is of an order of privileged beings among whom work, or any serious interest in life, is rather the exception than the rule, and who pass time in one unending

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struggle to kill it, largely by the form of sexual stimulus known as flirtation.

There was—except perhaps where the Socialist leaven was beginning to work—nothing offensive to public opinion in the spectacle of this sort of existence. The young man with an eyeglass who, bouquet in hand, waited expectantly at stage doors, the “masher” or “Johnny”, was the theme of innumerable songs, and was regarded with as much envy as amusement. That he was no figment of the imagination is indicated by the marriages of rich and titled young men with ladies of the stage, that provided the Press with an occasional mild sensation. For Society had discovered the art of publicity. Nothing would have been more beneath the dignity of the old-fashioned Society woman than to tout for the admiration of people who dwelt outside the charmed circle of her intimates. But a new spirit was growing as the old exclusiveness declined. Its first manifestation was the coming and reception of the professional beauty. Mrs. Langtry, the Jersey Lily, burst upon Society in the late seventies. She had excellent credentials, being the daughter of a Dean, a friend of the Prince of Wales, and an actress whose personal charm stood her in even better stead than her histrionic talent. The most exclusive mansions opened their doors to her, and she soon became the best advertised woman in England. In 1878 there were no less than three portraits of her in the Academy, by Weigall, Poynter, and the great Millais himself.

The professional beauty—if we may apply this term to the woman whose passport to Society consisted in her good looks and *chic* appearance—soon became quite a recognized institution. The names and doings of these lovely creatures were in everyone’s mouth, and there was something heroic about the efforts they made to maintain their position in face of ferocious

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and feline competition. But soon the competition ceased to be professional, for it is not in the nature of woman to resign herself to a second best in the matter of personal charm. Ladies of the bluest blood entered the arena, basked in the blaze of publicity, and enjoyed the friendship of the Prince of Wales. Quite early in the eighties portraits of fashionable women were not only in all the society journals, but on sale in the shops.

It had, in fact, become impossible for Society to keep to itself. Too urgent was the demand of the suburbs for news of those superior beings with whom every mistress of a villa liked to feel herself in mystic, sweet communion. And not only to the villas, but even to the slums, did the craze extend. One of the most famous of Phil May's pictures depicts two disreputable old flower women looking at a picture of "Lady Solsbury", and deciding that it is not really like what she is in private.

Thus when the charmed circle broke up, as it had by the end of the century, and dissolved into a number of smaller circles or cliques, often quite unconnected with each other, the doings of Society became the property of the man in the street, or rather the woman in the suburban drawing-room. But such is the power of words, that this good lady remained under the illusion that the word Society must refer—as it did in the sixties—to some well-defined social group about which it was easy to make generalizations. It was a paying proposition for any journalist to supply news of the ways, the gossip, and the sins of Society, and such information was freely forthcoming. But nothing was said to dissipate the impression that the orgies that took place at Mrs. Golightly Ikestein's house parties were equally characteristic of Chatsworth or Lansdowne House.

But the very fact of Society ceasing to form one group, if it allowed for a complete change of manners

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and standards, made also for the preservation of the old. It is the habit of the journalist to concentrate on the new and the sensational, and ignore that which goes on sedately in the old grooves. In the nineties, in spite of the epithet "naughty", there were numerous *grandes dames* who, like the Queen herself, remained as staid and exclusive as any of the sixties, and kept their daughters as strictly chaperoned as they had been in their own youth.

So that the Society of fashionable plays and novels must be taken as referring to that left wing of the upper class that was most powerfully affected by the irruption of the new plutocracy. Here indeed a change was taking place that might fairly be described as revolutionary. Dignity was no longer the aim, but pleasure; exclusiveness was less accounted of than publicity. There was—as almost everywhere else in this bustling age—a feverish striving to be up-to-date. Even conversation had to be smartened up; it was the pose of the man or woman of the world to be serious about nothing, and vivaciously brilliant about everything. The brilliance has rather worn off now—one can hardly recapture the charm that was supposed to invest even such an ideal specimen as Mr. E. F. Benson's "Dodo". In a modern drawing-room, one imagines, a woman who was perpetually playing the fool with such elaborate affectation as this extremely popular heroine would be voted not only heartless, but rather tiresome. And the type of flirtation that consisted in endless smart innuendo without ever coming to the point would hardly be understood nowadays. Modern Society has no place for middle-aged beaux like the Mr. Carter of the Dolly Dialogues, who passed most of their time dangling about the boudoirs of married women and engaging in bouts of verbal rapier play, with the points discreetly buttoned. The modern woman, if she was that way inclined, would want to cut all this cackle and get to business, if not,

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she would intimate pretty plainly that her would-be swain was outstaying his welcome.

All this could only have taken place where money and leisure were equally abundant. Though it was no longer unthinkable for a gentleman to go into business, work was certainly not fashionable, and poverty a thing to be hidden at all costs. Now that birth no longer served to distinguish the elect of Society from outsiders, the importance of money was greatly enhanced. Sir Gorgius Midas might have been born in the gutter and have picked up his manners in the street, but he could vie with any duke in the lavishness of his entertainments. Now that the middle class was aping the dress and style of Belgravia, there was only one way in which the Society woman could assert her supremacy, and that was by taking full advantage of her money power. It was a time of lavish ostentation; the scale of expenditure was everywhere forced up. The beautiful evening dresses, or trailing robes, of this time afforded endless opportunities for adornment, and there were many women who would have scorned to be seen twice in the same dress. Even the tips that were expected at great houses made the hospitality of rich relations an often prohibitive luxury.

There was never a time when the doings of this so-called Society were invested with such a halo of romance as towards the end of the century. This was only natural, now that Belgravia had become the dream paradise of the Suburbs, and now that its portals were invitingly open for the reception of those who, in an age of opportunity, contrived to accumulate a sufficient bank balance, or even to achieve enough kudos for lionization. Every city-goer carried a coronet in his gladstone.

Accordingly the novelist, the dramatist, and the portrait painter vied with one another in creating just such a dream world as that which was demanded of

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them. We have already met with typical denizens of this world in Dodo and Dolly ; such were Pinero's Gay Lord Quex and Duke of St. Olpherts, well-preserved bucks who, having devoted the whole of their lives to the languid enjoyment of mistresses, now bask in a maturity of charm, epigram, and cynical wisdom. It was in this fairyland that George Alexander loved to figure as the Prince Charming—and how many bosoms must have fluttered responsive to his "Little girl!"

Of course the fashionable portrait painter depended for his bread and butter on his skill in making his sitters see in the canvas exactly what they would have liked to see in the looking-glass. But there was one of real genius, Sargent, who aspired to be the Vandyck, the Gainsborough, of this world. Sargent was too great an artist to compromise with the truth, as he visualized it, either for gain or fame. But he idealized the old British nobility with a seriousness that proclaimed a countryman of Little Lord Fauntleroy. Charm and breeding were to him almost inseparable from birth ; he laid them thick on to his sitters. It is hardly possible to look at his portrait of Lord Ribblesdale without involuntarily beginning to hum the refrain, "He's a fine old English gentleman", and as for some of his ladies, the very canvas exhales such distinction that one feels it an impertinence to stare. But when Sargent had to paint not birth, but money, there was a very different tale to tell. His brush became tipped with venom, and figures appeared on the canvas that might have been expressly designed for purposes of Red propaganda. The fact that these merciless interpretations were received with gladness and guineas may not inconceivably be evidence of a greatness of soul in the patron connoisseur commensurate with that of the artist.

Even Sargent did not create so rosy an impression of Society as Oscar Wilde. It was Wilde's deliberate

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purpose, as an artist, to create a world completely divorced from reality, but it is doubtful whether he realized how far he was doing this in his own life. In one sense he might be called a snob, for his ideal world was obviously one peopled almost entirely by aristocrats—to judge by his writings it would seem as if he had dipped his pen in blue blood. But he was too great an artist to be content, like an ordinary snob, with any stupid or commonplace person who happened to have a title. He would, by his prerogative as one of the kings of letters, create his own aristocracy, and people his dream world with Lord Darlington, Lord Henry Wootton, Lord Goring, Lord Arthur Savile, and the rest of them. The deficiencies of an ordinary nobleman's education were nothing to Wilde—he would easily make that good—and if he had once defined a foxhunter as the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable, and knew perfectly well that the aristocracy were foxhunters to a man, he also knew that art is not bound by the laws of syllogism. The world of fact and logic might go hang—his aristocracy should radiate intellectual beauty.

Unfortunately the real Wilde wanted to move in a world of real lords, and by sheer force of genius he partially achieved his purpose. But he had to take his lords as he found them and not as he dreamed them, and it was one of these who brought about his expulsion from the dream world into a most sordid and pitiful reality. This was the Marquis of Queensberry, a personage of some importance in his day, and remembered by the Queensberry Rules that even now govern boxing contests. He was one of those rich men about town who are now almost an extinct species, but in those days lived out their lives with a superb indifference to public opinion. He once travelled to Homburg for the express purpose of thrashing the Foreign Secretary, Lord Rosebery, and it needed all the well-known tact of the Prince of Wales

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to prevent him from carrying out his fell intent.¹ On another occasion he got himself bound over for fighting one of his sons in Piccadilly. This son had asked the father to stop writing obscene letters to his, the son's, wife, and the Marquis had "replied by making a noise with his lips", whereupon both noblemen had fallen on with a will. And when a few years later the father lay on his death-bed, he remained game to the last, and since striking was out of the question, belched at the son in question, when he came to pay his final respects.² He was a critic of the drama—he had taken on himself to denounce a play of Tennyson's from the stalls, and he had unsuccessfully tried to present a first-night bouquet of carrots to Oscar Wilde. If we may judge from his youngest son's account, he must have been as "gay" as Lord Quex himself, and no unworthy successor of "Old Q."³

Such was the nobleman who, on moral grounds, set himself to compass the downfall of Wilde at the height of his fame and genius. For the real Wilde was not only the bright irresponsible creature that the world knew, but also a man afflicted by a terrible craving, the seeds of which may have been planted before birth. Only the sternest self-control could have kept him from violating the most sacred taboos of the society in which he lived, and moral restraint Wilde rejected on æsthetic principle. His case was one not for the judge, but the doctor. Far from corrupting anyone's morals, he himself fell a victim to the very dregs of mankind, who battered upon his weakness for money and betrayed him for more money. These were the myrmidons whom the gay Lord Queensberry marshalled against his enemy, and Wilde, exposed as a wallower in unmentionable filth, received a sentence which, like the old flogging round the fleet, was hardly more merciful than one of death. Society purged

¹ *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas*, p. 92.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-3, 100.

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itself of his memory, and his very name became, for a season, an indecency and a bawdy jest.

And yet the idealized version of Society which Wilde had done so much to create was complacently accepted as the image of the real thing.

CHAPTER V
THE HOME UP TO DATE

One of the stock things to say about the æsthetic movement is that it brought about a great improvement in standard of taste, and that the *fin de siècle* was consequently a sweeter, brighter period than that which had preceded it. To me the proposition seems doubtful.

The old, Puritan Philistinism, against which Matthew Arnold had inveighed, had indeed gone out of fashion. A certain veneer of culture was even considered *chic*, at any rate for ladies. If there was any complaint against art, it was that its newest manifestations and devotees were unmanly. The term "decadent" was a good deal employed as one of abuse capable of being applied to any artist more advanced than Leighton or any poet less orthodox than Tennyson. There was an outbreak of triumphant manliness at the time of the Oscar Wilde trial, and it was not obscurely hinted that any new path remotely capable of being described as æsthetic ought to lead straight to the jail.

In spite of this Philistine counter-offensive, the *fin de siècle* made no exception of taste in the general up-to-dateness on which it plumed itself. The days had gone in which the great middle class had confined its energies, in defiance of scriptural precept, to the combined service of the Lord and Mammon. It had also begun to honour the muses, after its fashion. The greatly increased amount of leisure that its womenfolk enjoyed enabled them to seek self-expression through their homes as well as their clothes. Even in country

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houses, there were faint strivings after the light, and ladies who liked to come back from a hard day with the hounds to a pretty drawing-room.

Then, too, there was no lack of guidance. The æsthetes had at least pointed out the grosser errors in taste perpetrated by the Victorians. Horsehair sofas, oleo portraits, wax flowers, and pictures on looking-glasses were banished to cottage parlours and the sitting-rooms of lodging-houses. There was a conscious striving after æsthetic effect, not only in interior decoration, but in architecture itself. The apostle of beauty was no longer a voice crying in the wilderness. Everybody with any pretensions to culture read and revered Ruskin. The efforts of William Morris to revive a Gothic standard of craftsmanship were duly honoured, and its products eagerly sought for by those to whom his communist principles were anathema. An arts-and-crafts movement was already on foot in the nineties. And even Whistler, in spite of his openly expressed contempt for the British public, had at last been taken to its heart, and had become one of those of whom it was almost obligatory to speak well.

In spite of the Philistine and academic old guard, there was no longer the former Victorian veto on everything advanced. The outcry provoked by the special circumstances of the Oscar Wilde trial was essentially reactionary—the spirit of so consciously up-to-date an age was like that of St. Paul's Athenians, who were constantly on the look-out for anything new. It was not opposition but indifference, and still more, ignorance, that art had to fear. An increasing number of both sexes found in muscular orgies an agreeable substitute for pleasures more refined. And those who did "go in", as they would probably have expressed it, for art, were, in the true spirit of their time, inclined to accept anything flashy and self-advertising for good, and to confound quantity with quality.

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If the development of art had been governed by purely æsthetic considerations, much that was undesirable might have been avoided. But there had never been a time when beauty had been to so large an extent the handmaid of commerce. It was easy for the art critic to propose—but it was the mass producer who disposed. This accounts for the comparative failure of William Morris to bring back his countrymen to the principles of sound and joyous craftsmanship that inspired work done under his immediate auspices. There was no lack of appreciation for William Morris products. But the mere fact that each of them was the result of individual skill, and that the workman is worthy of his hire, made them the comparatively rare luxuries of the well-to-do. And it was only too fatally easy for enterprising manufacturers to turn out, by machinery, and at a fraction of the cost, articles that were sufficiently “William Morrisy” to satisfy the demands of the purchaser who wanted her drawing-room to look “arty”, and was compelled to effect this, if at all, on the cheap.

William Morris was a romantic who had never attempted to deal with the conditions imposed by the triumph of machinery. He averted his eyes in horror from the nineteenth century and all its works, and sought refuge in a highly sentimentalized reconstruction of the Middle Ages. But it was no more practicable to get back from Victoria to John Ball, than it would have been for John Ball to have inscribed upon his banners, “Back to Stonehenge!” All that came from the refusal of leaders like Ruskin and Morris to countenance any new materials or new methods was that those who exploited such novelties were without any guidance and often without the self-respect that comes from the consciousness of good work worthily performed.

By the end of the century the possibilities of steel

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construction were beginning to be realized; new building materials were coming into use; but these things were still outside the realm of architecture. The architects had assimilated all that the Victorian Age had to teach, but they had singularly little to say. Many of them were still engaged in trying to put the new wine into old bottles, often with disastrous results. It is interesting to contrast the Forth Bridge, completed in 1889, with the Tower Bridge, completed five years later. The elder bridge is a piece of engineering pure and simple, and by sheer constructional frankness achieves dignity and a certain beauty. The other can only be described as a ludicrous caricature of a medieval drawbridge, between two towers which look as if they had been got out of a badly-illustrated modern edition of the *Morte d'Arthur*.

It is true that the Gothic Revival, of which this was one of the last manifestations, had gone out of architectural fashion, but this merely set the architects delving into the past for new styles to copy. As an alternative to Gothic, a style was evolved called "free classical", and whose freedom served as a cloak for all kinds of decorative extravagance, while to quote from Percy Fitzgerald's *Picturesque London*, published in 1890, "The so-called Queen Anne style has within the last few years displayed itself in every shape of extravagance, running riot, as it were, in fantastic freaks of brick. Entirely new quarters, as in the regions close to Sloane Street, have sprung up, entirely covered with these singular edifices. They seem to be dark, uncomfortable tenements, with peaks and gables of the most elaborate kind, and are certain to require constant repairs." It seems almost incredible that a style whose whole merit lay in its constructional simplicity could be thus perverted.

But Queen Anne was dead, and the architectural manners of the *fin de siècle* were utterly incapable of reserve. The main purpose of the average building

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was to show itself off to the greatest advantage, and usually in a suit of clothes borrowed from a museum. It would be difficult to point to any building of outstanding merit dating from this period, though numerous ornate public edifices were run up, and fine, showy country houses, preferably with turrets, eminently suited to the requirements of the new rich.

It was during these years that huge seaside hotels began to form a conspicuous feature of the landscape. These were usually of the new iron or steel construction, in order to achieve the largest possible size at the least possible expense, but since they were built to attract genteel guests, they had to be covered all over with ornamentation proper to brick or stone edifices along with such special improvements as violently gilded domes and pepper-pot lids.

It is in its villa architecture that the distinctive character of the period is most plainly revealed. It is a time of flimsy construction, the whole purpose of the building being apparently to give the maximum of veneer for the minimum of cash. Poky gables, finicky bow-windows, alternations of red and liver-coloured bricks, and obtrusive slate roofs serve to keep up an appearance of gentility. The cottages are villas in miniature, and look even more like dolls' houses. The utilitarian plainness of the sixties is quite discarded.

Inside mansion and villa alike, the almost universal desire to get the last farthing's worth of decorative effect played straight into the hands of the mass producer. It was a time of indiscriminate overcrowding. "Over-ornamented rooms", said Herbert Spencer, "are even more numerous than over-dressed women", and he instances "the numerous pretty things, or things supposed to be pretty, which burden the tables, the minor pieces of furniture, the brackets, and so on, including such absurdities as paper-knives with fret-work handles". He

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diagnoses a low moral attitude, originating in a desire for applause so obvious as to lower him who shows it in the minds of others—in other words, blatant vulgarity usurping the place of taste.

To satisfy this instinct an enormous amount of cheap and showy knick-knacks were unloaded on the market, and every device of advertising was employed to convince purchasers that they were getting the very latest thing in household decoration—which, in a sense, they were. The popularization of photography provided all and sundry with a means of obtruding their existence hardly less distressing, in its effects, than that of initial-carving on ancient monuments. Frames of every kind were turned out to enshrine these attempts to look pleasant. Some were of silver, more of electro-plating, some of plush, some gilt, some painted, and they were all hung up, or stood up, screaming at each other like parrots in the Zoo. Then, as befitted an up-to-date age, there was a tremendous craze for novelties. A novelty was a device for effecting some very simple purpose, like that of striking a match or sharpening a pencil, in a highly elaborate and ornamental way. It was essential to a novelty that it should masquerade as something quite different from what it really was. Thus if you wanted to strike a match, you had a large pig framed in relief, and under him the legend "Please scratch my back." You then started rubbing your vestas against the pig, and with good luck you might get the fourth or fifth to ignite. To do our fathers justice, they did not buy novelties for their own use. The time for distributing them was at weddings, birthdays, and above all, at Christmas. They looked as if they had cost more than they had ; they were usually sure of the applause that follows the latest conjuring trick ; and they would soon be merged in an accumulation of similar objects without their uselessness being noted. For though nobody bought novelties for himself,

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nobody ever thought of throwing them away so long as there was a cubic foot of space left for their reception. That would have been against all the instincts of the later Victorians. The more pretty things there were together the prettier the effect would be.

There has been such a complete clearance, or falling to pieces, of everything appertaining to the nineties, that it is difficult to convey any impression of an ordinary interior of that time, without being accused of wild exaggeration. I hope therefore, I may be excused for giving one or two concrete and typical instances of what was considered a smart and tasteful environment for ladies and gentlemen in that age of æsthetic endeavour.

My first specimen comprises one small corner of a small drawing-room, round about 1890. I have noted down the contents carefully from a photograph, and though my recollection of them is childish, most of the objects are things I remember quite sufficiently well. To start with the drapery, we have :

Huge velvet window curtains.

Heavy tapestry curtains of Persian design draping an arch.

Curtain of Eastern design, inlet with glass beads, draping a looking-glass.

Heavy drapery on the mantelpiece, also adorned with bits of glass.

Imitation Indian drapery looped over a Japanese screen.

Large armchair antimacassar with ball fringe.

Indian tablecloth on small knick-knack table.

Bit of Eastern drapery on the end of a couch.

A weird and nondescript bundle of drapery on a small table under two pots of ferns.

Another mass of drapery reflected in the looking-glass.

That is all the drapery—now we can get on with the other contents of the corner. These include :

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Peacock-feather fan—almost inevitable at this time—hanging on the wall.

Two pots of ferns.

One india-rubber plant.

Every inch of the mantelpiece crowded with small pots, photos, bronze clock in glass case, fans, calendars, feathers, and articles whose use, if any, is unascertainable.

Two armchairs, two common cane chairs, and one round chair with a back, but no sides, apparently intended to seat a dwarf.

Four tables—one of plush, two covered with ornaments, and one, also covered with ornaments, for writing.

Behind the writing-table what can only be described as a large three-storied junk stand complete with brackets and mirrors, covered with vases of different shapes and sizes, and hung with plates and photos.

A Brussels carpet of very fidgety design makes up the picture, except that we just see the corner of a bracket which is presumably loaded with more ornaments.

I estimate the area in which all these things are contained to be about six feet by eight, but to the unbeliever I will concede a possible couple of feet each way.

Our next peep is into the drawing-room of a wealthy middle-aged bachelor, who had the reputation of possessing a particularly refined and fastidious taste—he was quite the recognized *arbiter elegantiarum* among his neighbours. Here we find rather less drapery, though what there is lacks nothing for magnificence. The mantelpiece is covered with red plush with a deep yellow galloon fringe; there are two plush tablecloths, one with Indian embroidery and the other with a long tasselled fringe, and two Eastern antimacassars artistically draped. The chairs are severely but no

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doubt chastely uncomfortable, the one armchair, of plush, having a vertical back. There is a plush sofa, also straight-backed, and a lordly ottoman suggestive of the Manx arms, with a pillar-box erection in the middle covered with a fringed tablecloth. There are two tables, one with the inevitable plush top and one that might conceivably be a piece of really good old furniture. On one of these stands a portly brass pot, containing a plant of some kind, and surrounded by a dozen or so asters each in its own tumbledown vase. There is a large stand with fancy brackets flanked with shelves to support vases and plates, while in the angles of the fireplace are corner brackets, and the mantel-piece is crowded like Clacton Beach on a Bank Holiday. The overmantel is of Adam design, flanked by four miniatures in plush and two small portraits, and topped by five vases. There is, of course, a Japanese screen. The ceiling is elaborately decorated and such wall-paper as remains uncovered displays an embossed flower pattern. There is a large picture of a bursting wave, and a sort of crazy-pavement effect of other pictures, of all shapes and sizes, with bunches of candles sprouting everywhere there is a vacancy. Finally there is a large, comic cardboard cat—perhaps a Christmas present from some expectant nephew—enthroned on a receptacle of unknown purpose but sanitary suggestion.

I now come to a room that has happily survived, in something of its former glory, to our own day, and forms, I verily believe, a unique specimen of the period. It was built on to a much older country house early in the nineties, and has been left practically unchanged, except for such of its contents as have been unable to escape the ravages of time and domestic service. These probably included a fair amount of Japanese and bamboo ware, besides governess-made specimens, that I well remember, of the then popular patchwork covering. I hope I shall not be considered

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guilty of queering the pitch if I have brought back, from adjacent rooms, one or two objects that obviously belong to this one.

The difficulty about this room is to discover what is imitating what. We enter by doors unplausibly painted to imitate walnut, and framed in what is probably deal of the same unholy intention. The wallpaper is of imitation needlework in dingy reds and blues on a beige background. Beneath this is a dado—one of the artiest fashions of the nineties—of expensive stamped paper, whose original gold and silver have faded to a mottled brown dinginess. The chimney-piece and overmantel strike one at first as being of elaborately carved walnut, but on being tapped they give a tell-tale metallic ring. Brown and mustard tiles in the fireplace carry on the colour scheme. The carpet is an imitation Persian, of a predominant claret colour; so is one of the armchairs, the other being of livid green and yellow imitation tapestry. There are two standard candlesticks, painted to resemble marqueterie inlay. There is a drain-pipe, standing bolt upright, painted pale blue, and adorned with children's "scraps" of floral designs. One of the few genuine objects in the room is a stuffed dog in an advanced stage of decomposition. There is also a stuffed puffin, beak by jowl with a terra-cotta bust of Lord Beaconsfield.

The crowning glory of the room is its collection of minor ornaments, still jostling one another in all the multitudinous irrelevance of their hey-day. The display of photographs is poor, no more than twenty-two,¹ but this deficiency is more than compensated for by the profusion of what I suppose were once novelties. Let us go to one small, corner table, and catalogue a few of its exhibits:

Horse-hoof pin-cushion.

¹ I think there must have been, at some time, a drastic weed out, since in the next room there are fifty odd.

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Ash-tray with pedestalled, electro-plated golfer in Norfolk jacket.

Nickel dachshund pin-cushion.

Silver and cedarwood solid golfing shoe pin-cushion.

Horse-hoof inkstand with silver-plated inscription.

Silver golf-clubs and ball, forming paper-weight.

Silver-plated fox pin-cushion.

Silver ornamented pepper-pot, too small for pepper.

I will not trouble the reader with the whole of my catalogue of 57 articles, though I hope that its value, in full, as an historical document, may be appreciated some day, but I will select one or two specimen entries :

Horn yard-measure, minus tape.

Cheap brass envelope rack.

Dog's paw paper-knife.

Small horn cup, silver rim, purpose doubtful.

Electro-plated pen-wiper.

Advertisement bone paper-knife.

Hassock of magenta and green wool-work with beige background and green art serge.

Small scarlet wooden imitation milking-bucket, with gilded plaster flowers, tin handle, and pale green satin lining, possibly intended for a work basket.

Bellows adorned with water-colour seascape.

A perpetual calendar, operated by knobs that have remained unturned throughout the present century.

Hanging china receptacle, imitating bird's nest, purpose defies conjecture.

There is a lot more, but this ought to be enough, and more than enough, to show what the average taste of this brilliant epoch really amounted to.

No doubt there were exceptions, though these must have been sufficiently rare, to judge from the sort of room in which even Aubrey Beardsley was apparently content to die, and of which a photograph is extant in the Bodley Head edition of *Under the Hill*. Here we

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have violently patterned carpet and wallpaper, plush-covered and fringed upholstery—almost certainly brown—flimsy-looking table and bamboo bookcase, a room in which no modern man of taste could endure to live. But there were signs of improvement in the fact that even in commerce such a firm as Liberty's had begun to point the way towards better things. And in architecture, the masters of the coming century, Lutyens and Baker, had already begun to find their feet by the end of the old.

CHAPTER VI

CULTURE IN CANARY

It was on a night in the autumn of 1892, when the moon was bathing the Sussex landscape and flooding through the window into his room, that Lord Tennyson, "a figure of breathing marble", lay dying.¹ He had spoken his last words, a solemn benediction, and before his failing eyes lay a Shakespeare which he himself had opened at the passage :

Hang there, like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die.

It was the most magnificently staged death since that of Charles I, and it was the passing not only of a man but of an epoch. Now that the last of the giants who had flourished in the early years of the reign, except Watts and the mentally-dead Ruskin, had gone to his long home, the Victorian tradition in art and literature had ceased to bind. Everyone was conscious of living in a new age. Never had there been a more eager army of explorers after undiscovered countries of the soul.

Space does not avail so much as to catalogue the names of all the men and women of creative genius who were engaged in what Nietzsche would have called the breaking of the old tables. Most of these were young, and an extraordinary proportion died young. They squandered their vital energy with reckless prodigality. Some sought the stimulus of drink, others found that of the tuberculosis germ. As the Celtic saying was, "they always went forth to

¹ *Tennyson : A Memoir*, by Hallam, Lord Tennyson, pp. 774-5.

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battle, and they always died"—or if not always, at least far too often.

Now that the times, and the spirit of the times, have changed so radically, it is difficult to realize how rich were those "Naughty Nineties" in every sort of creative promise. To contemporaries, it seemed like the beginning of a modern Renaissance, a time of higher values and more exacting standards. Why should not the arts share in the progress that was making all things new? In no other age had there been such wealth of criticism. Every individual "maker"—to use an old Scots word whose revival is sorely needed—had the opportunity of seeing his work in historical perspective; all the experience of the past was at his disposal, its treasures were being carefully collected and preserved, while the improvement of transport and of the arts of reproduction made them readily accessible. There was a pooling of international knowledge. The art journals were as eager as those of fashion to get the latest from Paris. The greatest foreign conductors were in eager demand for concerts. The raw crudities of the earlier Victorians were no longer tolerable in circles professedly cultured. The spectacle of Ruskin swiping Canaletto, or even of Matthew Arnold waving aside Shelley, would have raised contemptuous eyebrows among the *cognoscenti* of the Bodley Head or of the New English Art Club. That sort of thing was not said nowadays.

The modern critic was, in fact, extremely careful to make himself acquainted with what could or could not be said. To blaspheme any dead or living writer who had once been admitted to the sacred circle of the starred, in the great unwritten Baedeker's guide to the Realms of Gold, was to become an outsider to whom gold of a more material kind, would cease to come. It was the age of the Man of Letters, or critical Panjandrum. Precisely how the Little Round Button

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was first acquired was not always easy to determine, for the Panjandrum had seldom written any work calculated to outlast a publishing season. But once he was established, he was unassailable. He had only to go on saying the right things about the right people to the end of an honoured and assured career. He would convince his public—and nobody would doubt him—of the wit of Congreve, the humanity of Sterne, the rareness of Ben Jonson. The invention of centenaries would soon give all the Panjandrums¹ the opportunity of discovering the same merits at the same moment in the same resurrected celebrity. Moreover, the Panjandrum was a power in the land—a budding author's reputation could be made by a favourable notice or frozen by neglect. For the Panjandrum seldom attacked; he was professionally urbane, and—to do him justice—usually good-natured. Some day his correspondence would be published and his genius for friendship—for the Panjandrum was invariably in with all the right people—revealed to the world.

To attack a Panjandrum was foolhardy; to expose him impossible. The last considerable attempt was made by Churton Collins, a critic who might himself have attained Panjandrumhood, but for his pedantic insistence out of season on exact knowledge. Among other essays in literary vivisection he submitted certain Histories of English Literature by contemporary writers to analysis, and showed them to be honeycombed with inaccuracies of the crudest description, not to speak of critical and stylistic howlers. The inconvenient fellow did himself no good and his victims no harm. One of them pointed out indignantly, by way of reply, that Collins had once been his guest. And Tennyson, who had become something

¹ Or possibly "Panjandra", though I hardly think the apparent asexuality of the species quite justifies the preciousness of the Latin neuter.

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of a Panjandrum himself in his old age, and had all the true Victorian's dislike of those who trouble still waters, growled out that Collins was a louse on the locks of literature. In spite of some temporary flutters, the books and their authors have continued to be standard :

The louse it was that died.

If the critical irresponsibility of the elder Victorians had been superseded, so also had the individuality that lay at the back of it. When Ruskin or Macaulay thought a thing was wrong, they said so quite plainly and damned the consequences. What they said was sometimes regrettable and occasionally perverse, but you felt, when you read it, that you were getting a genuine article for your money. With the new critic you knew that if he harboured any unproportioned thought, he would be too well trained to give it tongue, a change that Matthew Arnold would no doubt have hailed with delight as signifying the triumph of the academic spirit over insular provincialism.

And no doubt, within the limits thus set, an immense amount of useful work was done. Literature and art were written up and explored as never before ; budding talent could select its models from all times and styles, and had all the latest theories at its disposal. Small wonder if there was confidence in the capacity of the age to produce work of a higher order of merit, or at least of a more nearly impeccable standard of taste, than any of the past ! The danger was not yet realized of genius being so crushed beneath the weight of the past and confined by the tyranny of the present—even the latest—fashion, as to be incapable of spreading her wings for the empyrean.

There was another danger in the intensive study of form and style, lest art should become like a beautiful piece of mechanism without driving power. It was

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no longer a question of the artist or poet having something he burned to express in perfect form, but rather of his having previously perfected the form without knowing, or caring overmuch, what spirit that form was meant to embody. The elder Victorians had built their faiths upon all too shallow foundations that they had prudently taken for granted, but now that these had collapsed, there was little indeed to support faith for those who were unable to partake of Mr. Kipling's Blood and Law. It is not without significance that several of the most advanced spirits of the new movement should have sought peace by submission to the dogma and authority of Rome. Better be thought for than think in vain!

On one thing the apostles of the new culture were in agreement; they looked upon the world around them and found it the reverse of good. So far from attempting to give outward and beautiful form to the spirit of their age or to face its problems in any way, they deliberately isolated themselves in a world of their own. It was a favourite pose of theirs, and often a heartfelt conviction, that nothing in this world was worth taking seriously. This had been the theme of the last and most brilliant of all Wilde's creations before his fall, *The Importance of being Earnest*, as it was, in fact, of all his conversation. One might not comprehend life, still less aspire to mend it, but one could always turn it to ridicule, in the spirit of a contemporary song:

What care I? Let the world go by,
For it's better far to laugh than cry.

Or of John Davidson's lines:

Though our century totters graveward
We may laugh a little yet.

Mr. Osbert Burdett, who has written a sympathetic study of this phase, records two typical sayings of

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Lionel Johnson, a young man of infinite promise tragically unfulfilled. He justified his advocacy of Home Rule for Ireland on the ground that it would be the most picturesque thing that could have happened. And when he was received into the Church of Rome, he told some one that he had taken this most momentous step in a man's life "wholly for purposes of controversy"¹. One wonders what an earlier age, even that of the Prince Consort, would have made of this Johnson. A scholar who had carried off prize after prize at Winchester, whose mind was stored as richly as that of Burton or Milton, a poet, moreover, of exquisite sureness and delicacy, he would have seemed to have the world at his feet. But everything, somehow, ran to waste. He produced a few poems, perfectly chiselled, but chilled by a certain austere aloofness that never quite permits of their speaking to the heart. Add to these a slim book on Thomas Hardy and a few essays posthumously published, little gems of workmanship, but now almost forgotten, and you have the sum of his achievement. To a passion for turning night into day he added one for absinthe,² and soon became an invalid. After seven hopeless years, having only just arrived at the *mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, he fell down in Fleet Street, fractured his skull, and so died.

In breaking from the shackles of Victorianism the rising generation had rid itself of its inhibitions. Having cut loose from the old moral moorings, and having neither rudder nor chart, its frail craft were swept along the first current they encountered to eventual shipwreck. If the elder Victorians had sentimentalized about chastity, their successors did so with a more nauseating fulsomeness about such sordid

¹ *The Beardsley Period*, p. 180.

² A muddy green decoction, tasting like the liquorice powder of the nursery, and sipped in cafés by the pious equisetae in remembrance of Verlaine.

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things as alcoholic poisoning and promiscuous sexuality. "The Harlot's House" was a title that acted, like "Home, Sweet Home", as an agreeable stimulus. The cult of splendid sins was as old as Baudelaire, the only objection being that sins are more apt to be sordid than splendid. To sin really splendidly—as Mr. Kipling's Devil made clear to Tomlinson—force of character is needed. And force of character is not to be acquired without the faculty of inhibition.

Lack of inhibition was the real besetting sin of the Naughty Nineties, just as concentration had been the saving virtue of those earlier Victorians who believed in the importance of being earnest. There can seldom have been a time when genius ran so tragically to waste as during the *fin de siècle*. One thinks of Ernest Dowson, writing exquisite lyrics to the proprietor's daughter of some poky restaurant, who, having her doubts about a swain who was in the habit of getting mad drunk and using horrible language, very sensibly married the waiter. One thinks of John Davidson, who started as a poet, developed into the prophet of a frightfully long-winded Satanism—the sort of thing that goes down in Bolshevik No-God societies—and finally threw himself off a cliff. One thinks of Wilde himself blaspheming the spirit that was in him by condescending to the level of a dirty schoolboy, and emerging from jail so incurable a waster that he was unable to sit down and write the play, *Abbas and Jezebel*, by which he had planned to win back his fallen laurels. And one thinks of the honest old Elizabethan proverb—"the Devil is an ass".

It was in 1894 that the new spirit attained its maximum of prestige with the appearance of a new quarterly, *The Yellow Book*. This venture was due to the enterprise of one of the most remarkable characters who have ever figured in the publishing

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world—John Lane. He was a man of double personality, one of the hardest drivers of a bargain that ever printed contract, but also a passionate art-lover with a *flair* for producing beautiful books and attracting the pink of young authors. *The Yellow Book* did not set out to be the organ of any group, but it succeeded, during the first year of its existence, in attracting so many authors and artists of the new movement that its colour will always be symbolic of the nineties at their most ninetyish. Its original art editor and the designer of its first four covers was Aubrey Beardsley, who, before consumption cut short his all too brief career, established a fair claim to rank as the greatest of all English masters of the pure line. With him the cult of evil, for its own sake, culminated. He could draw like a fallen angel, or more precisely, like a Pre-Raphaelite turned decadent. He delighted to impart to the human face an expression of hard or leering or agonized sensuality such as one does not look to find this side of Styx. And yet this fascination of the artist by evil—may it not have been one of horror? In some pictures, *Lady Gold*, for instance, and *The Wagnerites*, the satire on the vices of the age is direct and merciless. There is a profound moral resemblance between the art of Beardsley and the prose of Mr. Aldous Huxley.

After *The Yellow Book* had been running for four numbers, occurred, in the spring of 1895, the scandal of the Oscar Wilde trial. Wilde, as it happened, had never had anything to do with *The Yellow Book*, but the effect on the so-called "decadent" tendency that it was supposed to embody was to bring it, and its promoters, under dire suspicion. It was known that the fear of further proceedings had caused quite a little exodus to France of well-known people. England was caught by a not unprecedented rampancy of virtue. Those who chuckled in bars over the latest story about "old Oscar" were determined that they

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would have no more tampering with morals in the name of the muses. The new broom was applied even to the chaste floor of the Bodley Head. Among the contributors to *The Yellow Book* was Mr. William Watson,¹ an accomplished poet of the old Victorian tradition, who could turn out verses that at their best might have been mistaken for Tennyson's. This gentleman felt that the time had come for him to do his bit on the side of the angels. One of the angels was good Mrs. Humphry Ward. With her moral support, Mr. Watson put down his foot. Beardsley, who, as usual, had designed the cover—a design in which the most ingenious modern critic would be puzzled to spot the offensive element—must go. Otherwise Mr. Watson's poem would be withdrawn,² a Hymn to the Sea, concluding, as a hymn ought to do, with an uplifting line,

Man and his greatness survive, lost in the greatness of God.

Here was a problem for the editor, Henry Harland, to whom the ultimatum was addressed, not to speak of poor Lane. Not that Lane loved art less, but that he loved Lane more, for as he once candidly remarked to the present author, "I am a man of business and not a man of sentiment." Moreover, he had been infuriated by the discovery that one of his office boys had been mixed up with the Wilde affair. *The Yellow Book* must be above suspicion, the cover must be scrapped, the art editor go. It would never do at such a juncture to lose the moral prestige conferred by Mr. Watson's hymn.

From this time forth *The Yellow Book* ceased to be of any special significance. It went on existing for another couple of years, and the support of such unexceptionable contributors as Gosse, Garnett, A. C. Benson, Walter Raleigh, and Mr. Watson himself,

¹ Now Sir William.

² *The Beardsley Period*, by Osbert Burdett, p. 253.

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were a sufficient guarantee to readers that their minds would henceforth be improved without the danger of being corrupted. Meanwhile Beardsley, now fast approaching his end, transferred his genius to a new periodical, *The Savoy*, designed to be a sort of left wing organ of the advanced movement. For this he produced that wonderful prose extravaganza—never destined to be more than a fragment—*Under the Hill*. This he illustrated with drawings in his last style, of such manifold opulence that it would seem as if he were trying to crowd into these final creations all the infinity of loveliness that was soon to be taken from his eyes for ever. There is hardly any suggestion of a Satanic bias—the artist had no time now for such irrelevances. And then Beardsley died and *The Savoy*, now almost entirely supported by the talent of the poet and critic, Mr. Arthur Symonds, did not long survive him. There was no market now for a decadent periodical, and several died still-born.

If we are to adopt that rather irritating phrase, the Naughty Nineties, we shall have to qualify it by explaining that the nineties ceased to be naughty, in the sense intended, shortly after the turn of the decade. Decadence lingered on for some time—there was one wonderful imitation of Aubrey Beardsley called *Count Fanny's Nuptials*, of which one phrase, much quoted by undergraduates, sticks in the memory about the nightingale singing the swan song of her virginity—though my own memory does not serve to recall whether or not the "She" was Fanny him- or herself. But decadence, after the Oscar Wilde affair, was never a dominant influence.

Perhaps the greatest literary product of this particular phase of æstheticism was one of which the world had no knowledge till its author was safely in the grave and his memory had been boycotted long enough to satisfy the honour of Mrs. Grundy. For Oscar Wilde had not been idle even within the narrow com-

pass of his cell at Reading. At long last, he had been allowed the strained mercy of pencil and paper. And he had availed himself of it to strike the last and most magnificent of all his poses. He saw himself purged by suffering, rising transfigured, crowned with thorns—a saintly, almost a Christlike figure. Nature, the “wearisome, uncomfortable Nature”, for which Wilde had not so long ago declared that we should care the less the more we studied Art—Nature would find him clefts in the rocks where he might hide, secret valleys where he might weep. Poor Nature was never to have the chance. Her most attractive caves and valleys were destined to offer fewer attractions to the released prisoner than a villa at Naples or even the meanest of Parisian lodgings. *De Profundis* was, in fact, the supreme attempt to make perfection of form fill the void of faith and substance. That the writing was not a sincere reflection of the writer’s mood it would be too much to assert. Sincere or not, it takes its place among the classics of literature. Not till some years after its appearance was it realized that the revulsion of feeling it occasioned was due even less to the published matter than to the faithful or prudent editor who detached it from the enormous epistle of which it was a part, much of it an egotistic and effeminate rigmarole of alleged personal grievances.

But though the decadent group had lost such semblance of unity as it had ever possessed, the artistic quickening of the *fin de siècle* went on. It was time of boundless experimentation. New movements were everywhere being started, new paths opened up. What *The Yellow Book* was in literature, the New English Art Club, founded in 1886, was in painting, except that it was not destined either to haul down the flag to the Philistines or to peter out. It provided a basis of association for all artists who would not conform to the hidebound standards of the Royal Academy. Whistler had taught English art to look

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overseas for its inspiration. The methods of the French impressionists were eagerly studied, and copied with perhaps too little attempt to adapt them to the requirements of the national genius. Mr. Sickert was in the van of this movement, and also Mr. Wilson Steer, before he adopted a style more redolent of the fields of Constable than the studios of the Quartier Latin. Mr. Clausen showed how the latest devices of coloration could be used to glorify the sweetest of old-world country-sides.

In sculpture excellent work was being accomplished. Gilbert had showed, by his Eros fountain in Piccadilly Circus, that plastic grace could thrive unrebuked even in London, and the tomb he designed for the Duke of Clarence, at Windsor, ranks high in the annals of monumental art. In Wells Cathedral it is not too much to say of Brock's recumbent effigy of Lord Arthur Hervey that it is no unworthy newcomer to, a glorious company.

Even in music, the long silence, or worse, that had reigned in the land of Byrd and Purcell, was at last beginning to be broken. Very wisely, England was going to school again, and reviving an intelligent appreciation of music by attracting the master conductors and executants of the Continent to her shores. She was producing composers of her own, if not yet in the very first rank, at least the precursors of revival. The thoroughly national genius of Sullivan was reinforced by that of Edward German, whose incidental music to *Henry VIII* was first performed at the Lyceum in 1892. In a more serious vein, there were Stanford and Parry. And in 1900 an event occurred of epoch-making importance. Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* gave proof, to all who had ears to hear, that great music was no longer the monopoly of Continental composers.

In literature there was the same tale to tell of restless activity, of new ways explored, of ancient idols de-

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throned. It was perhaps significant of what was to come in another sphere than that of art, that England should have turned with such eager admiration to "that sweet enemy, France". As the methods of the French impressionists had been copied by the painters, so were those of the French realists, particularly Zola, by the writers, though English virtue could not be content without jailing a publisher who was indiscreet enough to bring out a translation, not sufficiently mutilated, of that master's *La Terre*. Mr. George Moore, a thorough Parisian, showed, in his *Esther Waters*, how the record of commonplace lives could be both scientifically exact and artistically satisfying. The realistic method is much to the fore in the early *Yellow Books*, and the names of Ella d'Arcy, George Egerton and Hubert Crackenthorpe occur in this connection.

There is the opposite method of deliberately extravagant phantasy, of which *Under the Hill* is an example, and of which Mr. Max Beerbohm made himself a master in two arts. Nor must we forget the Celtic Revival associated, in the English mind, with the name of Mr. W. B. Yeats, whose genius had somewhat closer affinities with modern British than ancient Irish literature. He provided a healthy corrective for the French influence by substituting for its clear-cut Latinity the misty outlines of the Irish landscape. But to record all the shades and nuances of literary aspiration in this most prolific of decades would require a volume of no common bulk to itself.

The image that rises most readily in the mind's eye is that of children, running after the rainbow. There is a bag of gold, they know, where it touches ground. One or other of them will sooner or later secure the prize and yet . . .

And one thinks of those old Victorian giants, enthroned complacently on their hoards, and wonders how they ever came by such wealth.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW DRAMA

There is one branch, at least, of English art in the *fin de siècle*, to which the term Renaissance can, in its fullest sense, be applied. This is the art of the theatre. It is true that never, since the days of Garrick, had the English stage lacked some actor or actress of outstanding personality, but in mid-Victorian times such a thing as a native drama had practically ceased to exist, except on the paper on which Browning recorded his explorations into the dim recesses of the soul. There was that romantic exquisite Lord Lytton, who among some now almost incredible rant, at least gave, in *Money*, proof of the true dramatist latent in him. But with the exception of Shakespeare, who, like some primitive god, went through the ritual of being murdered every year, the sort of stuff put on the boards in the mid-century might fairly be described, in theatrical slang, as tripe.

The first promise of better things to come was given, in the sixties, by Robertson's *Society* and *Caste*, in which some attempt was at long last made to depict life as it really was. But Robertson's plots are clumsily patched together, and though his plays might even now stand revival for the sake of their quaintness, it would be hardly possible for a modern audience to take them seriously. Robertson died young, and his lead was slow in being followed up.

During the seventies and eighties the main interest of English drama is centred in an actor, Henry Irving, or rather, after 1878, in the Lyceum combination of Irving and Ellen Terry. Irving, though he only rose

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into prominence when the great Victorian Age was already on the wane, was the perfect type of the great Victorian. He took himself and his art with an awful and unquestioning seriousness, and his histrionic genius enabled him to impress that seriousness on his audiences. His very mannerisms contributed to the effect. By altering his vowel intonations—"death", for example, to something like "dath"—he succeeded in heightening the tension he aimed at creating. The effect of his presence resembled that of Gladstone on his audience. Their critical faculty was stunned. Irving would have been fully capable of declaiming *Pop goes the weasel* in a hushed silence. Shakespeare to him was emphatically the Bard, and to say that his rendering of Hamlet or Macbeth had the impressiveness of a religious function would be far short of the truth. It must be added that his interpretations of the parts could be nobly original—Shylock, for instance, he rescued from the contempt into which he had fallen as an anti-Semitic cockshy and invested him with a tragic dignity worthy of his creator.

But Irving was not the man to encourage a revival of dramatic composition. Apart from Shakespeare, he had no real desire for drama in which the chief honours would go not to the actor but to the author. Supreme master as he was of his craft, he wanted parts that he could stamp entirely with the impress of his own personality, parts that he alone could raise out of the commonplace and crown with an immortality all his own. The part with which his name will always be identified is that of Mathias in *The Bells*, a production of no special merit except such as Irving was able to impart to it. *The Bells* without Irving would be as great a fiasco as *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark, for the reason that *The Bells*, to all intents and purposes, *was* Irving. We wonder how many of those who have been thrilled by the play could remember the name of the dramatist.

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Here, too, the analogy with Gladstone and other great Victorians might be claimed, by the Devil's advocate, to hold good. It used to be said of those who had been carried away by the Grand Old Man's eloquence, that after the spell had been lifted and the critical faculty had had a chance to reassert itself, they had frequently asked themselves, in vain, what precisely it was that they had received with such gladness and whether they had not been part of the chorus in that perennial tragi-comedy called "Great is Diana of the Ephesians". Could it be suggested that Irving too might be a rhetorician, inebriated, and inebriating, by the exuberance of his own verbosity? There was a Devil's advocate, or disciple, who suggested it quite unmistakably in his correspondence with Irving's leading lady. His name was George Bernard Shaw.

During the eighties there were few signs that English drama was on the eve of a revival. If there had been no other obstacle in the way, one almost insuperable had been established in the censorial veto of the Lord Chamberlain, or rather of any underling whom that official might choose to employ. To this person every play had to be submitted by the producer—the author's existence was not regarded—and it depended on his arbitrary caprice, against which there was neither argument nor appeal, whether the play could be legally performed. Insult was piled upon injury by providing that the Censor's fees should come out of the pockets of his victims. That so grotesque a tyranny could have been established in the heart of a free country shows the utter indifference of a public that professed to idolize Shakespeare to the art of which he had been a master. For every play the Censor killed—and he did not draw the line at Sophocles, Shelley, and Maeterlinck—a score must have died unwritten, since few authors dared risk having months of patient labour rendered nugatory, and where there was no law but caprice, such risks

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were very great, except in deliberately salacious comedy, where suggestion, on lines tolerated by the Censor and thoroughly understood by the audience, was a safe and piquant substitute for candid indecency.

In 1889 an event took place whose importance as a step towards the emancipation of women we have already tried to indicate. It was even more important as heralding the Renaissance of the English drama. This was the performance of Ibsen's *Doll's House* at The Novelty Theatre. Whatever we may think of this play as propaganda—and as propaganda it was treated by both friends and enemies—there is no doubt that as a work of dramatic art it stood on an incomparably higher level than any new work produced on the British stage since the days of Sheridan. That is not to say that it contained within itself the elements of a great popular success. The Ibsen drama is not a plant that thrives luxuriantly in the London atmosphere. There is something in its sombre intensity that will never quite harmonize with John Bull's more easy-going temperament—something too that is apt to tickle his sense of humour in a way unintended by the author. The joyous noblemen for whose coming that atrabilious young dog, Rosmer, professes to look, the sporting grandfather who solaces himself with hunting expeditions in the garret, the incredible kittenishness of the relations between a seven-years-married banker and his spendthrift wife, may be defensible, in the abstract, but imagine Mr. Shaw dropping bricks of this clay!

There was soon a cult of Ibsen among advanced people, and in 1893 no less than six of his plays were produced in London, but it was never a cult that struck deep roots. It was as a stimulus of the English drama that Ibsen's influence was most powerful. That was largely due to the fact that in William Archer the Master found not only a translator, but an evangelist. Archer was a Scot, who, without any special

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creative ability of his own, had a positive genius for discipleship. He was desperately convinced of the importance of being earnest on the subject of Ibsen, and his enthusiasm was infectious. For though to the public Ibsen might never be more than a nine days' wonder, to dramatists, who were already beginning to look for a new dawn, he came as a wonder and an inspiration. Here was a dialogue that, instead of the tawdry rant and theatrical jargon that had done duty hitherto, was actually true to life ; here was a technique that put out of date the innumerable crudities and loose ends of accepted convention. There was something more—a high seriousness of purpose, an uncompromising search for truth, that might or might not lend themselves to imitation.

It was just how far this new spirit, as distinct from new method, could be imparted to English drama, that constituted the crucial problem of the new Renaissance. The fate of Bunyan's pilgrims, who came to Vanity Fair offering the truth, was not coveted by authors who were human enough to want a market for their wares. Some sort of compromise was called for. The public must not have more truth thrust down its throat than it was prepared to receive. Reality must be tempered to the demands of the box office.

Accordingly we have two distinct streams of dramatic tendency flowing from beneath the seat of Ibsen. There is first a transformation of the West End drama by the importation of just as much of the new spirit as can be reconciled with the conventional requirements of its patrons. There is, though slower in development, a genuine new drama, that aims at exposing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to all who care to receive it.

With the first and popular revival the names of Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero are most prominently associated. Oscar Wilde is another not-

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able figure, but he owes little to Ibsen, and much to French models. The real new drama is the creation and—so far as the nineties are concerned—practically the monopoly of one man, Mr. Bernard Shaw.

That Mr. Shaw's work possesses an importance immeasurably transcending that of the very able men who were scoring popular successes during the nineties—and, incidentally, raising the prestige of the British drama to a height undreamed of earlier in the century—will hardly be denied now that his reputation has attained its zenith. But the decisive factor of his supremacy has never been quite satisfactorily explained even by Mr. Shaw himself, and that it should be realized is much to be desired in view of the slump that is due, sooner or later, to follow his present boom, as inevitably as night follows day. It is certainly not the realism of his character drawing—Henry Arthur Jones's characters talk and behave far more as men and women do in ordinary life than Mr. Shaw's brilliant debaters—or than his men of straw who are put up merely to be scored off. It is not constructional unity—Mr. Shaw is always ready to sacrifice plot to dialogue. It is not even wit—there Wilde is at least his peer.

Mr. Shaw came nearest to explaining the secret with his modest query, "Greater than Shakespeare?" "Greater" is putting it a little high, but "the same as Shakespeare" would at least hint at part of the truth. For while such brilliant rivals as Beaumont and Fletcher were pandering to their audiences by concentrating on that one side of life that is concerned with sex relations, Shakespeare was taking the whole of life for his province, and putting sex into its due place in the scheme of things. Of Shakespeare's four supreme tragedies, in only one, *Othello*, is the sex-interest predominant, and even the Moor—do not his last words proclaim it?—has his heart deepest of all in his profession of arms.

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The dramatists who were dominating the stage, while Mr. Shaw was struggling obscurely and volubly towards recognition, might be described as being the Beaumonts and Fletchers of their time to his Shakespeare—at least in so far as the matter of their plays is concerned. They had their audiences to think of, and these audiences did not bargain for the naked truth as part of their evening's entertainment. They asked of the dramatist no more than to transport them, for three hours, into a convincing dream world, in which their emotions would be stimulated in the most agreeable way, and their reasoning faculty not unduly strained. The sex problems of the idle and blue-blooded rich were what they most delighted to see unravelled. Within the limits set them, their servants the dramatists gave them splendid value for their money. Not since Sheridan had plots been so deftly constructed or dialogue so brilliant. All that Ibsen had to teach, except the one thing most essential, was eagerly assimilated.

But this drama—for the sufficient reason that it aimed at nothing higher—could have no brilliancy that was not of the surface. The characters were pieces in a game with arbitrary rules. These characters inhabit a world where nearly everybody appears to have an unlimited bank balance and consequently unlimited leisure to tie his or her life into fancy knots. In Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* the whole trouble arises from the fact that a happily married young peer, having discovered that a certain lady with a past is really his mother-in-law, rather than communicate frankly to his wife the appalling information that she is not an orphan, not only pays blackmail, but embarks on a course of deception so compromising to himself that his wife, not unnaturally believing the worst, decamps to the house of the inevitable titled Don Juan. In Sir Arthur Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, a fastidious and conventional widower has

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suddenly taken it into his head to make an honest woman of a harlot. His daughter by the first marriage, an immaculate prig, gets engaged to an officer who turns out to have had dealings with the step-mother in her professional capacity. The ex-harlot, instead of keeping her mouth shut about the whole business, feels it a moral duty to inform her husband, who in turn feels it a moral duty to break off the engagement, and so the daughter's life is wrecked and the second Mrs. Tanqueray commits suicide. Henry Arthur Jones's *The Liars*, usually considered to be his masterpiece of comedy, centres round a tremendous conspiracy to conceal from a boorishly morose husband the fact that his wife, a frivolous society woman, has nearly, but not quite, allowed a man acquaintance to stand her a dinner at a riverside hotel. What the poor man—who has threatened not to spare her—can do to avenge himself for this contemplated gluttony is not explained. Even in the nineties such goings-on would not have raised a single eyebrow in the set to which Lady Jessica is supposed to have belonged.

It is all excellent fun and a capital way of passing an evening. But there is no element of permanence in such work, not even the poetic beauty that is the enduring part of Beaumont and Fletcher. Mr. Shaw's conception of the drama was more ambitious and far more serious. His drama should be a searchlight, to illuminate the whole of life and flood its darkest and deepest recesses. He had no idea of giving the public what it wanted. He was out to shock its dearest prejudices, to defy its conventions, to challenge the whole system of society, and ultimately to make the public want, and pay for, what he chose to give it. At the time he commenced as a dramatist, he had already tried his fortune at the easier craft of novel-writing, and proved an almost unqualified failure at it. His own friend, William Archer, could not believe

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him to be of the stuff of which successful dramatists are made. His was no doubt a compelling personality, with his Irishman's gift of the gab, his nimble pen, and his revolutionary philosophy. He added a much-needed element of sparkle to the statistical solemnity of his fellow Fabians. But that he could create a new model drama and force the world to accept it stood not within the prospect of belief.

Like Ibsen, he went straight to the heart of contemporary life. His first play was an ill-constructed, but extremely interesting, attempt to expose the capitalist foundations of wealth and poverty. He did not even stop short, in another, at dealing seriously, instead of salaciously, with the question of prostitution, though this proved to be more than the Censor could stomach. Yet another of the labours of this motley Hercules was to strip the last trappings of glory from the profession of arms. Sex itself was shorn of its romance, and women were shown forging their own careers and mistresses of their own fates. Whether they continued to be recognizable women was another matter.

By the end of the century, the new drama, with the fist of Mr. Shaw, was knocking loudly at the door for recognition. With his natural genius for advertisement, he had already contrived to get himself, and it, talked about among a widening circle of educated people. But he was still, to all intents and purposes, a dramatist on paper, for though some of his work had actually been produced, it was not yet the sort of stuff that managers had begun to take seriously as a commercial proposition. Very well then, if he could not get it performed, Mr. Shaw would get it published, and season it with prefaces and appendices. Moreover, as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he had contrived to be his own John the Baptist to the gospel he was presently to proclaim across the footlights.

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Thus we leave Mr. Shaw at the close of the century, still the gay and solitary adventurer who had started years ago on his mad crusade. But now it was beginning to seem as if there were some method in his madness. The gates of the New Jerusalem were already in sight. The new drama was not yet born, but the interesting event was expected.

It will be time enough when we come, in a future volume, to judge of his later achievement, to cast up the debit side of the account. To rise from office boy to multi-millionaire involves some sacrifice of scruple, and whether it was possible to resurrect a dead drama without some corresponding sacrifice of intellectual and artistic integrity the event would show. Granted that Mr. Shaw had wedded drama to philosophy, might not that philosophy itself turn out to be built up on the quick intellectual returns of the soap-box and the pamphlet? It may be better to blow one's own trumpet incessantly in the market-place than to remain a voice crying in the wilderness, but it is in the silence of the wilderness that the still, small voice is heard.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF SPORT

No survey of the *fin de siècle* could be complete without some mention of that great outlet for superfluous energy provided by sport. The historical importance of sport need not be pointed out to anyone who has stood in the shadow of the Colosseum or read the Odes which Pindar composed to hymn the joy of a city over the triumph of some successful athlete. During the nineteenth century England had been pre-eminently the country of sport, and the idea that foreigners could compete with Englishmen in any sort of athletic pursuit would have been scouted as too absurd for words. Had not Wellington hunted the fox, as he had hunted the French, from Torres Vedras to Toulouse? The very spirit of sport was claimed as an English monopoly. No foreign language had any equivalent to "unsporting conduct", or "it's not cricket".

There are two aspects in which sport affects the individual. Either he himself is an athlete, and takes an active part in the proceedings, or else he is a spectator, and such energy as he expends finds vent in shouting, clapping, or some other form of emotional response. If it were possible to cast a balance between the two, we should probably find that the sum of enjoyment derived from sport by proxy has enormously outweighed, in urban and industrial communities, that derived from muscular participation. It was only when Rome became a vast metropolis with a completely urbanized populace, that circuses became as urgent a necessity as bread. The same

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need was bound to arise, in an even more acute form, in the new towns that had sprung up as a result of the Industrial Revolution. After a week's more or less monotonous work tending machinery, the necessity for some more congenial outlet for energy becomes overwhelming. The crowded hour of glorious life on Saturday afternoon makes ordinary life, for the rest of the week, worth living. The conditions of the town are not those of the village, where everybody, more or less, is out in the open air, and has a green or meadow in easy reach where he can knock or kick about a ball with his pals, where, too, there are no opportunities for organizing the team spirit on a vast scale.

Early in the nineteenth century, it had become the special function of the aristocracy to organize and capitalize sport. The aristocrat had been a sportsman from time immemorial—William the Conqueror had "loved the tall stag as though he were their father". But it was a long time before the great man became, like the Roman Emperor, the provider of popular entertainment, and not merely of his own selfish, and often oppressive pleasure. Shooting has always remained more or less true to the old ideal of a rich man's exclusive amusement. To this day woodlands and moors are denied the ordinary man in order that their owners, at certain periods, may indulge in a carnival of slaughter, or hire out their domains to other and richer men for the purpose. The story of the depopulation of the Highlands by their own chiefs, first for pasturage but afterwards for sport, is one of the saddest in history.

Shooting, as the rich man's amusement *par excellence*, had been quite transformed, in the course of the Queen's reign, by the more luxurious standards of the new age. The old type of sportsman had trudged laboriously over the fields with his muzzle-loader, only too glad if at the end of the day he had bagged a

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round dozen of birds. At the close of the century the sportsman would stand in a carefully chosen spot at the edge of the wood, or in a butt, with one man, or perhaps two, attending him with spare guns, while his quarry was driven over his head to be massacred. Bags now ran into three and even four figures. Of course these easy conditions could not be obtained in such forms of sport as partridge and woodcock shooting, or in deer stalking, where it was still necessary for the sportsman to find his quarry before shooting it. And there was something in the British temperament that revolted from the colossal massacres that were staged on the Continent, in which beasts were driven in droves and birds in flocks to be butchered under conditions that required from the sportsman little more than mechanical trigger-pulling. The German Emperor was notoriously fond of this sort of entertainment, but then nobody who had taken part in a shoot with the German Emperor was ever under the least illusion that he was a sportsman in the English sense. He was out to kill; he had a divine right to be enabled to do so on an imperial scale, and there was an end of it.

One very popular form of amusement, much patronized by the Prince of Wales, was the shutting up of pigeons in boxes, and then, by an ingenious contrivance, opening the lids, in order that men with guns might display their skill by slaughtering or wounding the birds as they tried to fly away. This is one of the few forms of modern sport that has shocked the public conscience enough to get it stopped by law, though it goes on as merrily as ever at Monte Carlo.

There is a different tale to tell of hunting, which, though no more humane to the quarry, was far more of a popular entertainment. The meet of the hounds was a public and popular function, especially when more people had horses to ride on than in these days of the motor. Even those who could not ride could

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derive a good deal of pleasure from following the sport on foot. Moreover, as the century advanced, even masters of hounds felt themselves under a certain necessity of conciliating the farmers over whose land they rode, and whom they expected, at the expense of their own hen-roosts, to refrain from private war on "Mr. Reynolds". The farmer became the spoilt child of the hunt; he could get his sport for nothing, and also put in claims for compensation for any damage done by foxes.

Hunting at the end of the century was very different from what it had been in the days of "Nimrod" and old Jack Mytton. What would have most surprised these worthies, could they have returned to the scene of their old activities, would have been to see almost as many women as men out with the hounds, and these not of the adventuress type, but the wives and sisters of the men. They would have found the breed of hounds probably improved, faster and less heavily built, but they would, in all but the most favoured districts of the shires, have missed the long runs when a man, or a fox, could go anywhere or do anything. A new terror had arisen in the form of wire, and foxes—well aware of the proclivities of gamekeepers—were less willing to stray from their own districts.

But for all that, hunting remained firmly established as—pre-eminently—the popular sport of rural districts. It no doubt acted as a social factor of importance, in preserving the ascendancy of the landed gentry. And such arbitrary oppression as it involved affected too small a minority of recalcitrant poultry-keepers, cultivators, and humanitarians, to bring it into serious disrepute.

Another sport in which the rich functioned even more obviously as the entertainers of the people was that of racing. This had already been in full swing under the auspices of the Merry Monarch at New-

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market, and good Queen Anne, who was an enthusiastic sportswoman, had added Ascot as her contribution. From that time the breed of English race-horses had gone on constantly improving, and racing had strengthened its hold on the popular affections. As far as the ordinary man was concerned, the sport was one in which he never dreamed of taking a direct part. His function was twofold, partly that of spectator, partly of gambler. Towards the end of the century, even that of spectator was often cut out, and innumerable poor people contrived to have their flutter without even so much as seeing the horse of their fancy.

It was a curious freak of language that the mere fact of capitalizing sport was sufficient to confer the reputation of sportsman. The rich owner might hire some one to superintend the buying or breeding of his stud, some one to train his horses, some one else to ride them—his whole initiative in the matter might be confined to the signing of cheques—and yet he, and not these others, would be acclaimed as the great sportsman and patron of the turf. So long as patronage of the turf remained in aristocratic hands, the absurdity was not so great as it might have appeared, since the lord whose colours were most frequently seen past the winning-post was likely to figure as conspicuously, in his own pink coat, in the forefront of a stiff run with the hounds. But when it came to sleek money-bugs and Rand-lords assuming the title of sportsman on the strength of their bank balances, the case was different.

The fact remains that there was no surer title to popularity than that conferred by the capitalization of sport. The successful grocer, Thomas Lipton, achieved the reputation not only of a sportsman, but a defender of his country's honour, by entering the first of a series of yachts in a constantly repeated attempt to win the America Cup. Lord Rosebery

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derived as much kudos from the fact of his owning the Derby-winner, Ladas, as from that of his being Prime Minister, though this was not wholly to his advantage, for no small part of the Liberal Party strength was derived from the support of Non-conformists, many of whom looked upon the race-course as the peculiar domain of his Satanic Majesty. The ever-increasing popularity enjoyed by the Prince of Wales arose largely from his reputation of being also the Prince of sportsmen. He was certainly an excellent shot, though not of the extraordinary merit of his son, and even figured once at Lord's, though—cricket being no respecter of persons—his bag on this occasion was a duck. But he had neither the build nor the temperament that fits a man for violent exercise. It was as a patron of sport that his laurels were won. And people regarded his zest for amusement as a sort of royal sanction for their own.

Thus the aristocracy, though they had forfeited the position they had occupied in the eighteenth century as leaders in the realms of statesmanship and culture, did fulfil a certain function as organizers of entertainment. Whether it was good for the nation to have its natural leaders specialized in this way may be open to question.

In any case, they could no longer maintain their old practical monopoly of leadership. The field of their activities had been in the open country from which their wealth was derived, but the new, industrial masses needed to have spectacles provided for them to which they could have convenient access. They were unable to get out constantly into the open, and no local race-course could function often enough to serve their needs. Their obvious resource was provided by ball games, that could be played in enclosed spaces in the very heart of the towns. In England this meant cricket in the summer and football in the winter.

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Of these two, cricket was much slower to adapt itself to the changed conditions. It had a tradition and ceremonial that were already deeply rooted in the English past, and it is a curious fact that, in the British Isles, its popularity seems confined to districts predominantly English—it has never taken deep root in the Celtic Fringe. It was also, during the nineteenth century, the one game in which the amateur could look the professional fairly in the face, and, in fact—since he was more inclined to take risks—the amateur was apt to be considerably the more popular of the two with the spectators. The continuity of cricket is greatly strengthened by the fact that no other game so far admits of historical record. In football or rowing, the individual is merged in the side; the hero is easily forgotten, and all that time preserves of a contest is the bare result. With cricket, the doings of every individual admit of exact record, and with the aid of the score, and an adequate commentary, the historic matches of the past can be followed, and their thrills experienced, when the contending heroes have become as legendary as those of Greece and Troy.

The last thirty years of the century might be described as the golden age of cricket. They were dominated by one great personality, that of W. G. Grace, indisputably and, for all time, the Champion. W. G. was the greatest in size and not the least in impressiveness of all the great typical Victorian personalities. If Tennyson had attained the cricketing eminence of the present holder of his title, he would, one feels, have faced the bowler with the same majestic assurance, and his beard would have wagged as formidably as that of "the old man". His style would have been of the same direct and downright mastery, English to the core, with no touch of Oriental subtlety, or machine-like colonial efficiency.

The period was one peculiarly rich in historic con-

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tests, because neither wickets nor batting methods were standardized to the extent they have since become, and there was no question of prolonging matches for anything up to a week to ensure a decision. The opening year of our period, 1870, witnessed the immortal Oxford and Cambridge Match, in which Yardley scored the first inter-'varsity hundred, and Cobden, when Oxford only wanted three runs to win, got all the three remaining wickets with successive balls, producing a scene of excitement unique in the annals of Lord's. In 1878 arrived the Australians, raw-boned bearded giants, who seemed as if they had stepped straight out of the Bush, and who amazed everybody by defeating, in the space of one day, a strong M.C.C. side headed by W. G. himself.

For the next twelve years, the visit became biennial, and in 1880 the first All-England team took the field on British soil. It is significant that England was captained not by W. G., but, as of right, by the one peer on the side, Lord Harris. The game ended in a victory for England, though not without a tremendous fight. Two years later, however, the tables were turned at the Oval, when, on a rather dismal September day, the English team, who seemed to have had the match absolutely in their hands, proved utterly incapable of standing up to that great bowling genius, Spofforth, and were beaten after a desperately contested fight by a bare seven runs.

To the end of the century cricket managed to retain its soul and prestige, and to maintain the healthy balance between amateur and professional talent. While W. G. was enjoying a wonderful St. Martin's summer celebrating the half-century of his life by scoring a thousand runs in the month of May, a new artist of the willow burst into fame—the Indian Prince, Ranjitsinhji, who imparted a touch to batting as distinctively Oriental as that of Grace was English. At the end of the Queen's reign, cricket could claim

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the distinction of being the one game in which, whether on the village green or the turf of Lord's, all classes habitually played together in a spirit of comradeship and on a footing of equality.

It was not so with football. That, during the seventies, had aimed at being, unlike cricket, a completely amateur game. The Football Association Cup was then competed for by such teams as those of the Universities and the famous Royal Engineers' side, and it was only when, in the early eighties, the Northern Clubs began to make a serious bid for supremacy, that professionalism was first insinuated and, in 1885, definitely legalized. The Amateur Clubs dropped out of the competition, and the stronghold of Amateur Football now became the Rugby Union, which, in spite of a professional secession in the North, maintained the Rugby Game as an amateur preserve.

Meanwhile the Association Game, now organized under the auspices of the Football League, became entirely professional and spectacular. The object was to hire teams of expert players who should provide the industrial workers, on their half-holidays, with the maximum of excitement that could be crowded into a brief space of time. The imagination of the spectators was relied upon, not in vain, to sustain the illusion that the teams that wore the club colours consisted of picked representatives of the locality. As a matter of fact, football professionals came to be bought up as easily as slaves in the old-time markets, and the measure of a club's talent was usually the depth of its purse. A Cup-tie match was a gladiatorial contest brought up to date, with the killing part cut out.

Of its popularity there was no doubt. In 1897, as many as 65,000 spectators attended the Crystal Palace for the final Cup-tie, and this was small compared with the figures of the coming century. The emotional

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safety-valve thus provided no doubt made for social stability. The man who lashes himself into a fever of excitement about the Arsenal or the Villa is less likely to boil over with indignation about the iniquities of the capitalist system.

The demands of the middle class, of both sexes, for some open-air relaxation from the monotony of their daily lives, were met by the importation of the ancient Scottish—and originally Dutch—game of golf. It was about the middle of the eighties that the Golf Stream, as Mr. Punch called it, began to flow Southwards, and soon golf links began to spring up all over the English countryside. There was a dour Calvinist austerity and silent concentration about the game that had been foreign, hitherto, to the spirit of English sport, but there could have been no better way of getting the tired office worker out into the open air, and making him forget the worries of business in the more acute discontents arising from uncarried bunkers and fozzled drives. It was also a game in which the elderly could take part without discredit—had not there been old Tom Morris to set the example?

Lawn tennis started by being a genteel and party amusement, an agreeable romp, in which both sexes could take part. It was only gradually that a more serious side emerged, a scientific technique was evolved, and championships began to be contested. Up to the end of the century it retained its class exclusiveness, and, as its name implied, was played mostly on private lawns by the intimates of those fortunate enough to possess them, and such clubs as did exist were confined to one social set.

Hunting had already been conquered by Woman; lawn tennis had been hers from the first, and at golf she soon began to claim equal rights with Man, though on most links there were ladies' tees, to shorten the length of the hole for the weaker sex. How far feminine athleticism had progressed by the beginning

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of the nineties may be judged from a note of J. Ashby Sterry in the *Graphic* of the 18th of July, 1891.

"Complaint was formerly made", he says, "that ladies did not take enough exercise. Now it is argued that they take a great deal too much. They have gone from one extreme to another and athletics have been very much overdone. Whether it is in gymnastics, or lawn tennis, or swimming, or golf, they are too enthusiastic and have no idea of moderation."

But the demand for exercise, in which both sexes could take part, continued to expand. For one winter,¹ there was a perfect craze for paper-chases, a form of sport in which the "hounds" showed a marked tendency to struggle in couples, while a small band of earnest schoolboys and perspiring aunts pursued the trail. And then mixed hockey arrived—about 1893—and soon became the rage. Hockey had been a very primitive game, played mostly at schools with sticks cut from the tree, and though modern hockey had had its rules and clubs since 1886, the first mixed games were chaotic affairs, in which any serviceable cudgel or even walking-stick was employed, and the ball was borrowed from tennis, or was a special contrivance covered with string. All this was very rapidly changed, and mixed hockey teams, armed with the best implements that money could buy, took the field week after week during the winter, of course within the limits of social equality, or nearly so, for occasionally somebody just beyond the borderland would be admitted, for the sake of his prowess, to the game and the subsequent tea. There were curious niceties of etiquette, for in some circles it was considered not quite good form to wear shorts. The present writer can testify to having been constrained, much against his will, to don riding breeches and gaiters, with a hunting stock, for the honour of playing outside left in a grown-up team.

¹ I think 1892-3.

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The craze for this sort of tea-party hockey gradually died away, and the game was raised to such a high standard of technique that it became almost a monopoly of amateur specialists. For the drift was already setting, at the end of the century, towards a deadly seriousness of both sexes in the pursuit of what had once ranked as pleasure. If you presumed to meddle in games, you must be an expert or nothing.

CHAPTER IX

THREE SUPERMEN

After the election of 1895, the mood of triumphant self-satisfaction, which had been growing as the century waned, obtained full sway over the national consciousness. The old Queen, with her physical powers slowly failing but her spirit as indomitable as ever, had the satisfaction of seeing in power just the ministers that she would probably have chosen herself. Her satisfaction was shared by the overwhelming majority of her upper and middle-class subjects, while as for the workers, what they had seen of the last Liberal Government had been calculated to inspire them with little respect and less hope, and they had hardly begun to envisage a ministry drawn from their own class as a serious possibility. For many of them the Empire offered attractions decidedly superior to those of Home Rule and Local Veto, and only comparable, for excitement, with those of professional football.

It was undoubtedly a very strong team that Lord Salisbury had put into the field. He himself, and the Duke of Devonshire, supplied just that element of aristocratic stability calculated to inspire confidence in the mind of the ordinary Englishman. Mr. Balfour, the leader of the Commons, was known to possess one of the subtlest intellects of his time, and had, as Secretary of State for Ireland, proved himself a man of iron courage and will-power. But the man on whom the limelight was focused, and to whose personality these others seemed mere foils, was "Joe"—for the man in the street seldom

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referred to Mr. Chamberlain by any other name. That he had ever been the almost Republican of the left wing, who had talked about the possessing classes paying ransom and had bandied threats with Lord Salisbury about breaking heads, was now quite forgotten. To those of us who had just begun to take a boyish interest in politics, Joe figured as

In fact quite the cream
Of the Unionist team.

His very face seemed to have changed from that of the dour and whiskered mayor. A more thorough-going application of the razor combined with the eye-glass, the orchid, and immaculate tailoring, to produce a new, dapper appearance, as of one whom duchesses delighted to honour. But there was a firmness in the chiselling of his profile that made him the very embodiment of that quality most esteemed in the later nineties—efficiency.

Chamberlain had shown sound judgment in choosing for himself the Colonial Office, not hitherto among the most distinguished of ministerial appointments. But "Colonial" was already an out-of-date title. What Chamberlain designed to be was nothing less than minister for the Empire. His ambitions had for some time been tending in that direction, for he, more than any other statesman of his day, had the vision granted to Mr. Kipling of Little England becoming the centre of a world-embracing dominion. He saw the daughter nations growing to manhood, and he believed it was possible to bind them together in a vast, Pan-Britannic federation. He had now the opportunity to make the dream a reality. Instead of the chilling officialdom that had hitherto characterized the relations of Downing Street with the colonies, he approached them with a new, imaginative sympathy, and a desire to give the utmost possible extension to the imperial idea.

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There were critics who did not hesitate to impute to Chamberlain the vilest and most sordid motives, for no statesman, since the time of Walpole, had ever contrived to excite such ferocious hatred in his opponents, and few such enthusiasm in their supporters. But the critics were wrong, for Chamberlain, who had long ago made his fortune, had loftier ambitions than that of feathering his already amply lined nest. He was one of those men who are only happy in creation. He had created a new model of political organization in the Birmingham Caucus; as Mayor he had created a new model of municipal efficiency; as minister he had designed to do for the whole country what he had done for his native town, and to make its social system a model for the world. To this end he was now able to do no more than act as a stimulus to his Tory colleagues, lest they should depart from the standards of social progress already set by Cross and Randolph Churchill, but as his vision became world-wide his interest in social problems grew more perfunctory.

He was, except in the scope of his genius, a typical man of his time. The inflamed nationalism that had captured the civilized world, and was destroying the old Liberalism, had now taken the form of a feverish desire for expansion. Every important nation had become acutely and aggressively race-conscious, had convinced itself of its superiority to all other races, had discovered kinsmen beyond its borders whom it must, by fair means or foul, expand those borders to include. Less sentimental motives entered into consideration, for those even more highly industrialized communities began to feel that their own territory was no longer sufficient for their needs—they must control their markets or go hungry; trade followed the flag. It was obvious to nobody that these overlapping ambitions, pursued *à outrance*, amounted to collective insanity, and could only end

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in universal catastrophe. It was the spirit of the time, and everyone wanted to be abreast of the time.

Nobody who has followed Chamberlain's career can doubt the sincerity of his desire to "lay firm and deep", as he expressed it, "the foundations of that imperial union which fills my heart when I look forward to the future of the world". But it was a very different ideal from that of international righteousness which Gladstone—even if he had not always practised it—had never failed to preach. To Chamberlain patriotism, as expanded into imperialism, was enough. Nowhere in his later speeches do we find the least hint of any moral ideal transcending that of the power and greatness of the British Empire. Chamberlain's mind was as clear-cut as his features.

By the time Chamberlain assumed the seals of the Colonial Office, another Pan-Britannic champion had arrived at the zenith of his career. Cecil Rhodes, like so many strong men of that time, was an invalid, and had gone out to South Africa under a death-sentence. Throughout his life he was haunted by a sense of its shortness—"so little done, so much to do" were nearly his last words, with the unspoken corollary, "That thou doest, do quickly." "Amazing" was a word constantly employed in popular journalism at this time, but if ever it had exact appropriateness, it was to the career of Cecil Rhodes. Even as a young man, he had made for himself a colossal fortune out of the diamond mines at Kimberley. These mines had been grabbed for Britain, as long ago as 1871, under Gladstone's auspices, by a piece of imperial sharp practice that no one has ever been hardy enough to defend. The history of Rhodes's career, up to a certain point, differs little enough, in quality, from that of other self-made multi-millionaires in England and America. He was honest enough to avow his belief in money—

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"philanthropy plus five per cent" was his way of putting it. And if the claims of God and Mammon are to be reconciled anywhere, it is certainly not in a struggle for survival on a South African diamond field. But if money had been the limit of Rhodes's ambitions, his career would have been even as that of his rival and eventual associate, Barney Barnato, the cheery, vulgar, uneducated East End Jew, who successfully realized his ideal of bliss when he had a pail filled with his own diamonds, from which he could fill his hands, and allow the pretty things to run through his fingers. Poor Barney crowned a career of unbroken success by throwing himself into the sea from a home-bound liner.

But money was never the end of Rhodes's career, as it was of Barnato's. Like Chamberlain, he was a born creator, and he only valued money in so far as it afforded scope for his creative energies. He held the Pan-Britannic ideal in its most extreme form. Lady Lugard says of him that the object to which he proposed to devote his life was nothing less than the governance of the world by the British race.¹ The special province that Rhodes had marked out for his own efforts was the African Continent, and he dreamed of a continuous British territory stretching from the Mediterranean to Table Bay, and bound together by a Cape to Cairo Railway.

By a masterly use of money, and the political influence that his wealth had won for him, he started the Empire on an expansion northwards which brought it, in an incredibly short space of time, right into the centre of the Continent. Rhodes, with his invalid's appreciation of the time factor, fully recognized the need for haste if the vacant territories were to be grabbed in time, and he also knew that empires are no more to be built than fortunes by kid-glove methods. He secured the

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Cecil Rhodes."

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permission of Lord Salisbury's Government, in 1899, to revive the old Elizabethan instrument of a Chartered Company, with himself in control, charged to carry the expansion of the Empire to, and beyond, the Zambezi. This he successfully accomplished, the expansion only ceasing when it impinged on the belt of territory which Germany had contrived to draw across the route of the proposed Cape to Cairo railway. Altogether Rhodes had made the enormous addition of 750,000 square miles to the Empire, though in what sense this territory was "possessed" by England, or how much such possession could profit the possessor, no one at the time paused to inquire. If you coloured territory red, the Queen had it, the Empire had it, you and I had it, and that was all there was to it.

Of course, there were black people who had had it before. There had to be some dirty and bloody work before the promised land of Rhodesia was made safe for civilization, but this white man's burden was very efficiently shouldered by the Company's emissaries and troopers. It was no worse than was going on all over that gigantic Naboth's vineyard that was called Africa, and a great deal better than the unspeakable horrors perpetrated in the Congo district.

In this latest phase of imperialism, the sordid and the sublime were strangely mixed. One likes to think of Rhodes riding out into the lonely Matoppo Hills where he now lies buried, to interview the chiefs of insurgent tribes. His life was at their mercy, and they knew it. And yet when he asked them whether it was to be peace or war, they lay down their sticks in token of surrender. "We shall always call you Lamula'mkunzi"—separator of the fighting bulls—they told him, and he replied that they were his children.¹ And his first care was to

¹ *The Life of Cecil Rhodes*, by Sir Lewis Mitchell, Vol. II, p. 165.

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provide them with the food they needed to tide them over to the next harvest, pledging his own money, if the resources of the Company were not forthcoming, for the purpose. Unscrupulous he may have been, but he was cast in the heroic mould.

Though Rhodes's health had been to all appearance restored, he never ceased to act as a sick man in a hurry. He looked to see the triumph of the Pan-Britannic ideal in his time—and that time threatened to be short. It was unfortunate, therefore, that the chief obstacle in his path consisted in the opposition of those Calvinist and unprogressive Dutch farmers whose farms dotted the great grass-lands of the Veldt. The modern age had broken rudely in upon that Old Testament simplicity, with the discovery of a fabulously rich gold-field in the heart of the land that their fathers had trekked into the unknown to possess. A cosmopolitan horde, anything but God-fearing, had been drawn to the lure of cheap riches, and the Boers saw their hardly won independence in danger of being swamped by sheer weight of numbers if they were to concede rights of equal citizenship to these new-comers. The land was theirs, and if strangers liked to come into it to make their fortunes, they deemed it only fair that they should do so on sufferance, and pay the owners for their privilege. To be relieved of his taxes in this way was a solution highly acceptable to the shrewd soul of a farmer. But it was one difficult to reconcile with the British principle, "no taxation without representation". And the new-comers were mostly of British extraction.

In 1890, Rhodes, with Dutch as well as British support, had become Prime Minister, and almost dictator of Cape Colony. It was an essential part of his scheme to unite British and Dutch in South Africa into a federation of communities within the Empire. But now he felt himself brought up short

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against the dull inertia of Boer resistance to progress in any shape, and most of all under British auspices. That resistance took visible form in the personality of the Transvaal President, Paul Kruger, the very antithesis of Rhodes in character, but, partly for that very reason, more nearly his match than any other opponent he had encountered. The old burgher, who had taken part in the great Boer exodus from the Cape in the year of the Queen's accession, and had shared in the now almost legendary triumph of Dingaan's Day, had all the typical farmer's shrewdness and a double portion of his pig-headedness. He was also a religious mystic, of a kind that England had not seen since the days of the Ranters and Muggletonians. As a young man, he had wandered forth to commune with God in the wilderness, and ever since then Paul Kruger and his Maker had been on extremely intimate terms. This in no way prevented him from seeking his ends—which were those of his God and people—by crooked courses and with the aid of unscrupulous associates. In private life, he was a homely and unpretentious old fellow of the kind who gets inevitably known as "uncle". It says worlds about him that when they asked his leave to put up a statue to him in Pretoria, he stipulated that a hollow should be scooped in the crown of the top-hat, to catch water for the birds.

Such was the man who stood across the path of Rhodes's schemes for a Pan-Britannic Africa. His own Cape Dutch Rhodes was able to capture with the splendour of his imagination, but the Jehovah-drunken old Dopper beyond the Vaal had no ears for such appeals. As an English farmer might have put it, he weren't a-going to be druv. He was determined, in his heart, not to make the least substantial concession to the strangers within his gates; he was equally determined that if they dug on his

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land, they should pay for it. He might bargain and haggle till all was blue, but like Queen Victoria, he did not believe in giving up anything he had got.

Had Rhodes possessed patience, he would have seen that the problem would be best left to solve itself. Uncle Paul was already a great-grandfather, and it was his prestige that was maintaining the reactionary party in power. Once he closed his eyes, the more Liberal and progressive influences among his countrymen would be able to assert themselves. But Rhodes could not afford to wait, and, as it turned out, when Kruger's body was brought back to rest in his beloved Transvaal, Lamula'mkunzi had already been sleeping for two years in the solid rock of his Rhodesian hills. The knot that death would be too slow in untying, the sword must cut. Rhodes would deal with Kruger as he had dealt with Lobengula, King of the Matabele, who had incurred the doom of Naboth in Rhodesia. In such a case one could not be nice in choice of means—and Rhodes did not hesitate to use his double rôle as Premier of the Cape and controller of the Chartered Company to concentrate on the Transvaal borders, with the idea of providing a spear-head for an armed revolt in the Rand, or gold-field, the same force of mounted infantry that had shot to pieces Lobengula's impis. Old Kruger waited quietly, as he himself put it, for the tortoise to put out its head. This was done with untortoise-like precipitation, for the commander on the spot, Dr. Jameson, was even more impatient than Rhodes himself, and upset his chief's apple-cart by invading the Transvaal with his few hundred troopers. The whole affair was a ludicrous fiasco. The mining community had no stomach for armed rebellion, and Jameson, after a long ride across the veldt to within a few miles of his destination, was easily rounded up by Boer

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commandos, and, without any attempt to die in the last ditch, very sensibly laid down his arms.

The world-wide horror and reprobation aroused by this barefaced invasion of a friendly country in time of peace were none the less genuine, in view of the fact that every country was engaged in exactly the same game of beggar-my-neighbour—Kruger himself, in his younger days, had failed in a Jameson Raid of his own on the sister Boer Republic. Though there was never a shadow of proof, it was almost universally believed that Chamberlain had been secretly backing Rhodes and Jameson. The mere fact that Britain had beaten all her rivals in the race for territory, made these rivals all the more ready to believe the worst of her. British imperialism was everywhere denounced, and Britain was in such a position of isolation as she had occupied at the time of her struggle with her American colonies. Old Kruger, who had magnanimously handed over his captives to the tender mercies of the English law-courts, was only confirmed in his obstinacy, and began feverishly to arm against the struggle that he now foreboded with Chamberlain and the power of Britain. As for Rhodes, his failure had been on the same colossal scale as his successes, and the worst feature of it was that he had forfeited the loyalty of the Cape Dutch, and worked up the whole Dutch community of South Africa into a state of embittered race-consciousness.

We have seen in Chamberlain and Rhodes the supreme representatives of British nationalism, in the Pan-Britannic form that brought it into line with the "Pans" and imperialisms of the Continent. But a third is wanted to complete the picture, for the race-fever that had swept through the world with epidemic virulence, was only kept alive by continual doses of mass-suggestion. The new field of journalistic opportunity had hitherto been exploited mainly for the

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purposes of entertainment, though W. T. Stead had shown how the new sensationalism was capable of arming the journalist with formidable powers of swaying public opinion on the most serious issues of domestic and foreign policy. But Stead was essentially an amateur, and had never really regarded the question in the dry light of business. He was too much of an enthusiast for that, too hopelessly the victim of his own suggestions. Fame and fortune still awaited the adventurer into the field of serious journalism who would take a perfectly scientific view of the problem how to work upon the public mind so as to achieve the maximum of sales, and consequently of profits.

Such a man was Alfred Harmsworth—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, such men were Alfred and his brother Harold, a perfect combination of journalistic genius with a business judgment almost infallible. From the very first, their methods were those of thoroughgoing realism. They were out to scrap all the obsolete nonsense about the newspaper proprietor being a responsible public functionary. He was a merchant of whatever wares the public liked or could be made to demand. His success, like that of any other merchant, was measured by what it would fetch. The Harmsworths laid the foundations of their fortunes by rivalling Newnes in his own field. Alfred's tawny *Answers* was soon figuring as conspicuously on book-stalls and in the little shops in poor streets as the green *Tit-Bits*. But the brothers were minded to begin the distinctive part of their adventure where Newnes had left off. In 1894 they acquired the *Evening News*, in 1896 they founded the *Daily Mail*, whose phenomenal success, from the first, signalized the final conquest of journalism by the new methods.

Its founder's avowed object of making it the busy man's newspaper, exactly describes the scope of his

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achievement. The man who paid a halfpenny for a hurried glance at the morning's news in a crowded smoking carriage on his way up to the City, or at the latest from Gatwick and the divorce court on his way back, did not want to be called upon to use his mind. As well hire a horse and cart, and run behind ! He wanted to have his mind agreeably stimulated, his attention caught without being strained. He wanted to be provided with such impressions as would be translated swiftly and automatically into emotional response, without any tedious necessity for deliberation and judgment.

This was exactly what the new journalism, with marvellous efficiency, set out to do. Whether either of the brothers had ever studied a treatise on psychology is at least doubtful, but as practical psychologists they had an intuitive genius that served them better than any professional treatise could have done. The proof of the paper is the circulation, and that proof was overwhelming.

Emotional stimulus being the object in view, it was important to ascertain what emotions could most easily be stimulated. In the late nineties this was not difficult. No passion was so easily aroused as that of aggressive patriotism, particularly when sublimated into imperialism. There was no such way of exciting the team spirit as that of appealing to the pride of empire and consciousness of racial superiority. The most paying of all journalese stunts was a war. That great lord of the Yellow Press, Mr. Randolph Hearst, had already shown his appreciation of this fact, when he had bellowed his country into war with Spain. The enormous increase in *Daily Mail* sales during the first year of the South African War, showed on which side editorial bread was buttered. For though men die and civilization totter, the proof of the paper is the circulation.

CHAPTER X

T A - R A - R A - B O O M - D E - A Y !

Those who use that irritating nickname, "The Naughty Nineties", are expressing, at best, part of the truth. The reference is to a small group of advanced writers and artists of whose names—except, for too obvious reasons, that of Oscar Wilde—the average man had scarcely so much as heard. "Naughty" was scarcely the adjective that contemporaries, who happened to be neither plutocrats nor Bohemians, would have dreamed of applying to that time of trailing skirts and packed family pews. But if one were compelled to find a substitute, the best that could be done would be to draw on nautical analogy, and talk of "The Roaring Nineties", which seems more expressive, on the whole, than the "Noisy", the "Hustling", or the "Jingo Nineties". The impression one wishes to convey is of a quickening of the tempo of life, an increase of its volume, as if some powerful wireless were to be tuned in nearer and nearer to reaction till the roaring point is reached.

If one closes one's eyes, and tries to conjure back those vividly remembered years, catchy and idiotic refrains begin to reawaken, one in particular, which everybody was singing and whistling, which the piano organs ground out with endless reiteration, and from which you never seemed able to get away :

Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay !
Ta-ra-ra-BOOM-de-ay !

and so *ad infinitum*. It was supposed to be a part of a

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song, something about a naughty girl at the seaside, but not one person in a hundred knew or cared what the song was, or attached any meaning whatever to the refrain. It was not the only thing of the kind going about, there was

“Hi tiddly hi ti ti ti ti!”

but this, though popular, never caught on to anything like the same extent.

The refrain was a cry out of the heart of the age, and exactly expressive of its spirit. It meant that the average person of 1892 and the following years was so satisfied with the general well-being and progress of his wonderful age, that he wanted to give vent to his feelings in inarticulate cries, like a child at a treat. An alternative title to “Hi tiddly hi ti” was “I’m all right”, and this would also have been the accurate translation, into prosaic English, of “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!” Sensitive decadents did indeed feel the spirit of the time jar horribly on their nerves, in direct proportion to its noisy self-assurance. But the average man had not the least doubt of his own all-rightness, and that of his age and country. It is hard to blame him for expressing his *joie de vivre* in his own simple way. It is to be feared that such strains—if we tried to adapt them to our own age—would sound rather too like the “Oh happy Starkey!” extorted by the Red Indian from the lips of the captive pirate.

During the decade, the pace of life noticeably increased. The bicycle came into general and strenuous use. The towering “ordinaries” had been the monopoly of a few adventurous experts—some time early in the eighties there is a photograph of Alfred Harmsworth, even as a boy in the van of mechanical progress, leaning thoughtfully against a bicycle nearly as tall as himself.¹ But as soon as the obvious idea of the safety bicycle, with equal wheels,

¹ Reproduced in Hamilton Fyfe’s *Northcliffe*.

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had penetrated the consciousness of manufacturers, it became known that the new means of locomotion was at the command of anybody who had a few pounds to lay out, and a pair of sound legs to pedal with. Improvements followed one another throughout the decade, notably the pneumatic tyre, rim-brakes fore and aft, foot-rests for coasting, the free wheel, the little oil bath of the Sunbeam. Famous models were turned out by competing firms—a Beeston Humber was as much esteemed then as a Rolls-Royce now.

It is difficult for us to realize what a wonderful and joyous acquisition a bike—for so it was almost invariably characterized—was in the first freshness of its discovery. It meant this—that hitherto, unless one had been prepared to order out the horse and trap, if any, and make a serious expedition, one had been tied to walking distance of one's own home. Now, however, one had only to get the bike out of the shed, jump on to the saddle, and be ten miles away in the course of an hour. It meant that one's legs would propel one at three times the speed of old days. This gave a sense of power and freedom that made the mere act of biking a luxury. People biked just for the pleasure of doing so, they circled enthusiastically round the Parks, and even if they had not "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" on their lips, they certainly had it in their hearts.

The coming of the bicycle brought the emancipation of women perceptibly nearer. It became more difficult now than ever to anchor the girl to the home, and the bike was not a vehicle that lent itself to chaperonage. The element of restfulness imparted to life by the stay-at-home woman of Victorian tradition was now, like so many other Victorian traditions, quite out of date. It was a hustling age, and life was speeded up for Jill as well as for Jack.

In 1896 the bicycle was joined by the motor-car, and

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the law was at last repealed that made it obligatory for every vehicle propelled by mechanical power to have a man with a red flag trudging in front of it. The thing was at first looked on as a huge joke, and on the day that motoring was legalized a procession of cars gathered on the Embankment with the object of getting to Brighton. Some stayed put at the starting-point, others came to grief on the way, only a gallant remnant struggled through to their destination. A song, in which this adventure was guyed, went somewhat as follows :

We all agreed this thing cannot be trusted,
And so said Pa,
"Quite right!" said Ma,
When all at once the thing blew up and busted,
And near and far
Went bits of Pa!

For in these early days it was quite seriously believed that a motor-car would blow up and bust on any, or no, provocation, and nervous landlords actually refused to harbour such infernal machines on their premises. But soon it was realized that the new horseless carriage had come to stay; and the results of long-distance races organized on the Continent—for the English roads were not available for that purpose—showed that motoring was an essential part of that progress, faith in which was the nearest approach to deep religious conviction that the great majority of the public could make.

For though the forms of orthodoxy were still maintained, religion had come to count for exceedingly little in the life of the nation. In clerical circles there were still the time-honoured intrigue and bickering between High and Low, but what interested the parsons no longer interested the nation as it had done in the days of the Oxford Movement or of the first evolution controversy. Most people who counted for anything intellectually had convinced themselves that

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in the conflict between science and religion, science had definitely got the best of it, though it might not always be in the best of taste to advertise the fact. And the attempt of a certain group of advanced High Churchmen to reconcile faith and progress and take an evolutionary view of inspiration was somewhat too obviously dictated by cruel necessity.

It was not that the nineties were specially interested in anti-religious propaganda. They had so many other things to get excited about that they had ceased to care much about ultimate problems. If you asked whether Man was descended from an ape or an angel, the answer was something like "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" or "I'm all right". It is not when people are in such a mood that they cast up their eyes even to an empty heaven.

The devil was well, the devil a monk was he!

The climax of national self-satisfaction came in 1897, when Queen Victoria celebrated her second, or Diamond Jubilee. The good old lady had at last, like her reign and Empire, broken all records. Even since her last Jubilee, fabulous stretches of territory had been added to that Empire, and the map of the world assumed a positively apoplectic appearance. The new Jubilee took the form of a gigantic advertisement of Britain's imperial power. Slouch-hatted colonials, turbaned sowars, figured conspicuously in the pageant, in which the tired and lonely widow, with her face like parchment, was driven, amidst the blare of bands and the cheering of vast multitudes, to the steps of St. Paul's—for she was now too feeble to undergo the ordeal of another service in the Abbey. A spectacular naval review was staged at Spithead, to make it quite clear to a jealous world that Britannia continued to rule the waves. And there were bonfires and junketings galore in every town and village in the kingdom.

In the midst of all these rejoicings, there came a

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strange and solemn warning, from the quarter it was least expected. Mr. Kipling was now the accredited laureate of Empire—the official holder of the title constituting a rather bitter joke of that old cynic, Lord Salisbury, at the expense of the Muses. Of course Mr. Kipling was expected to make his contribution to the general pæan. In one line of his poem, and one alone, he came up to expectations, concentrating in it all that was most outrageous in the arrogance of the hour :

Lesser breeds without the Law

in other words—foreigners. But for the rest of his poem, Mr. Kipling was inspired by spirit of a Hebrew prophet, recalling his countrymen from their trust in “reeking tube and iron shard”, from “frantic boast and foolish word”, to the fear of a God whom, in their heathenish pride, they had almost forgotten. The poem was universally applauded, but no one particularly cared about its meaning, or felt the remotest shiver of apprehension at the words

“One with Nineveh and Tyre.”

But the influence of Mr. Kipling was helping to inspire strains of a very different order. The “frantic boast and foolish word” swelled in louder and louder chorus. The brief and brilliant hey-day of the music-hall had begun, and the old tavern singing clubs had given place to highly capitalized palaces of entertainment, sometimes with a promenade attached for the convenience of whores and their clients. Enormously-paid entertainers, some of them of real genius, functioned at these shows. And amid much that was merely aimless and frivolous, it became an obviously paying proposition to exploit to the full the hectic nationalism that had a peculiar appeal for young men in an after-dinner mood.

It would be an interesting task to collect all those

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forgotten choruses by which the Sons of the Blood contrived to vaunt their fathomless power and flaunt their iron pride. They would make excellent reading on any day of national humiliation. Some of them were just maudlin, like

Off with your hat when the flag goes by
And let the heart have its say!
You're man enough for a tear in your eye,
That you will not wipe away,

some historical :

In Kent when Romans came to seize old John Bull's
British soil,
We didn't let great Cæsar have the best of all the spoil :
We've thrashed the Danes and Saxons too, and history
can brag . . .

Evidently, and sometimes the whole world is challenged to come and take us on, on the ground that :

A little British army goes a long, long way,
or the note becomes bluff and manly, as in :

Oh Tommy, Tommy Atkins, you're a good 'un heart
and hand,
You're a credit to your calling and to all your native
land . . .
God bless you, Tommy Atkins !

one of several specimens of the then fashionable "Tommy" craze. A slight variation is the cult of the wooden-legged pensioner, who longs :

to face the foe once again before I go,
And to fight beneath the dear old flag.

But the culmination of it all was in *Soldiers of the Queen*, whose immense popularity, just before the South African War, may be judged by the fact that the tune is still a favourite at military tattoos. The words must be read in full to be believed and consist of a full-mouthed, incoherent roar to the effect that

Nations that we've shaken by the hand
Our bold resources try to test,

T A - R A - R A - B O O M - D E - A Y I

but that we are roused, have buckled on our swords, have said good-bye to diplomacy, and that though the singers themselves are happily not compelled "to military duties do", the hired soldiers of the Queen, who have never yet been beaten, will take on all comers and—as the Philistines of old days had put it—show them a thing.

The Press, particularly that of the new, popular school, reeked with blood and reverberated with thunder. Every sort of violent adventure was provided for the delectation of readers, and future wars, with awful slaughter and appalling carnage on every page, were lusciously detailed. One of the most popular of the new weeklies actually went so far as to publish a serial in which England is supposed to be at war with France, Germany and Russia, and easily licks the lot, taking Paris by storm, smashing to pieces the German army, and conducting a successful invasion of Russia, among the conquering geniuses being Sir Redvers Buller.

In the early spring of 1898, an aged and dying man stepped into the train at Bournemouth on his last journey home. Turning to those who stood on the platform to bid him farewell, he said, "with quiet gravity"¹:

"God bless you, and this place, and the land you love."

It was the last public utterance of Mr. Gladstone.

¹ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, Vol. III, p. 526.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEFLATION OF OPTIMISM

In two years following the Diamond Jubilee it must have been apparent that the pace of imperial progress was too killing to last. Social reform had now receded into the background. Mr. Keir Hardie and his cloth cap were no longer seen at Westminster ; Chamberlain's scheme of Old Age Pensions was postponed till the Greek Calends. The country had more exciting things to think about. There was a war on, of the sort calculated to rejoice the heart of every true imperialist. Britain was advancing up the Nile to avenge Gordon. The Sirdar, Sir Herbert Kitchener, was written up as one of those cold, silent supermen, who only lacked a Watson on his staff to make him a perfect magazine hero. Drawing the railway after him as a spider draws her thread, he arrived outside Khartoum in the late summer of 1898. Then there was a glorious and spectacular massacre. The Khalifa's whole army came out with their primitive weapons, and most obligingly proceeded to rush across the desert in one great yelling horde, for all the world like the animals driven on to the guns in one of the big Continental batteries. Every bursting shrapnel tore a black hole in the crowd, and the Lee Metfords, firing ten shots to the minute, mowed them down as fast as they could get into the field of fire. The bag, in killed alone, topped the ten thousand mark, and the Anglo-Egyptian-Sudanese losses were trifling. That was the end of the Khalifa's power, and he himself was rounded up and killed some months later. Some mean-spirited fellows—so

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it was generally agreed—tried to make political capital out of the Sirdar's prompt action in destroying the Mahdi's tomb and throwing his remains to the crocodiles, but that only enhanced the public appreciation of the strong man acting strongly.

For the moment it looked as if this war were destined to be the prelude to one even more exciting, for it turned out that a French major with a few followers, mostly natives, had arrived on the Nile at a point above Khartoum. This, under the rules of African grab, was to establish a claim to part of the continent that England had already claimed as her own, and the Khedive's, special preserve. John Bull was in no mood to stand nonsense from foreigners. *Punch* depicted him dealing with a scoundrelly-looking French organ-grinder :

“What you give me if I go away?”

“I'll give you something if you don't.”

Less insults have precipitated war. Luckily there were cool heads at the Quai d'Orsay, and Lord Salisbury could be the most conciliatory of Foreign Ministers. The thing was settled somehow, and France, desperately wounded in her pride and seething with hatred of England, withdrew her expedition. Imperialism had scored another sensational triumph, and the mind of the nation might have been fairly described, in Mr. Kipling's words, as “drunk with sight of power”, and consequently devoid of all sense of reality.

The next move in the game was obvious. Gordon had been avenged; not so Majuba and the added humiliation of Jameson's fiasco. It was time to deal with Kruger, and get that question of the Rand franchise settled once and for all. A strong man, Alfred Milner, of the type so popular in the nineties, was sent out as High Commissioner to deal with the situation on the spot. After nearly two years spent in studying it, he came to the conclusion that the

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strong line was the only one to take. On the last day of May, 1899, Milner and Kruger met in conference at Bloemfontein. The President had come prepared to drive a hard bargain. The younger man was determined not to be drawn into a haggle. He knew exactly what he had come to demand; he was determined to accept nothing less; and he kept on pinning his opponent remorselessly down to the point. That is not the way to do successful business with a farmer, and the more he was pressed, the more obstinately determined was the old Doppler not to be cornered. "If you won't do any bargaining," he complained, "it will not be my fault if we don't come to terms." And so the Conference broke up without result.

After this, it was fairly obvious that the only way for the two strong men, Chamberlain and Milner, to carry their point, was by force of arms. They continued to press their demands with more and more menacing insistence, while Kruger temporized and offered carefully qualified concessions, and the commandos began to muster on the frontier. It is proof of the strange atmosphere of unreality that invested the whole proceedings, that that frontier had been left practically defenceless, and if the Boers had been a little quicker in their preparations, they could have swept over the whole of British South Africa. As it was, the British were able to rush out a division from India just in time to save Natal and act as a magnet to the Boer forces. The end came when the British Government had announced its intention of formulating its own proposals, and began mobilizing an army to back them. The Boers—the Free State having now thrown in its lot with the Transvaal—were not minded to wait for its arrival, and so declared war in the form of an ultimatum.

Few people in England doubted that the army corps that was being dispatched to South Africa,

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under the command of Sir Redvers Buller, would easily be able to dispose of Kruger's undisciplined burghers. Rhodes himself was known to be contemptuous of the Boers' fighting qualities. There were even newspaper experts who believed in the ability of Sir George White's little army already on the spot to win the war off its own bat. The country was not unpleasantly thrilled; the music-halls rose to the occasion, and exploited the prevailing mood of patriotism for all it was worth. Their patrons at least had no doubt as to what would happen,

For when they see the British soldier come,
For old Oom Paul things will fairly hum!
We've three good men in Buller, Powell and White;
There'll be a hot time in the Transvaal to-night!

And when the news came through of the first battles, kopjes stormed, Majuba avenged, a British general falling mortally wounded in the hour of victory, delight was unbounded. This war was going to be even better than the last.

And then other news began to come in. It appeared that White had been soundly beaten, that a couple of regiments had been cut off and had surrendered after sustaining strangely few casualties, that the rest of the Natal army was shut up in the little town of Ladysmith. But this was nothing to what was to come. It was annoying that the programme should be upset in this way, but it would make the victory of that great captain, Sir Redvers Buller, all the more glorious by contrast. The army corps started brilliantly with no less than three victories, each more expensive than the last, gained by one of its divisions dispatched to raise the Boer siege of Kimberley and Cecil Rhodes.

And then, in one week in December, came a cumulative series of blows that did at last arouse the country from its dreams of optimism, and plunge it

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into such gloom and consternation as had not been within living memory. The army corps was beaten, not at one point only, but at all. Gatacre in the centre, Methuen on the road to Kimberley, finally Buller himself with the main force in Natal—and he had lost a couple of batteries. It appeared that Buller had not even tried to manœuvre; he had just ordered his men to proceed in the direction of the Boer trenches, and when a thousand or so had been shot down, had ordered them to leave off. Any schoolboy with a map could have thought of something more clever. What nobody knew at the time was that Buller had followed up this performance by one more amazing still. He had heliographed to White a suggestion that he should surrender Ladysmith. White was not a great commander, but he was not the man to throw up the sponge in a fit of the dumps.

What had happened was simply that the power of the modern rifle had asserted itself in a way that had been predicted by a Polish civilian, Ivan Bloch, two years before, but which, up to the time of the Great War, the soldiers had steadily refused to take into their calculations. So long as England commanded the seas and Continental Powers did not intervene, it was only a question of bringing the overwhelming resources of the Empire into play to achieve some sort of ultimate victory. But the country had gone into a mood of tragic heroism, and the necessary business was accomplished in a state of emotional tension bordering on hysteria. The popular hero, Lord Roberts of Candahar, was sent out to take supreme command, with Kitchener, the strong man of the Sudan, as Chief of the Staff, and the egregious Buller was allowed, or rather had to be goaded on, to continue his blundering and half-hearted attempts to relieve Ladysmith. All available troops were sent out, volunteers were called for, and welcome proof

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was given of the loyalty of the colonies to the imperial connection.

The immediate crisis soon passed. Lord Roberts, with his now overwhelming forces, surrounded and captured the Boer army that had been besieging Kimberley, and brushed aside the feeble forces that barred his advance to the Free State capital, Bloemfontein. Even Buller at long last managed to butt his way into Ladysmith. There now only remained one more garrison to be relieved. This was at Mafeking, an isolated post of no military, but of great spectacular, value. For here was war of the best magazine type, a light-hearted and not too tragic adventure, and a hero, Colonel Baden-Powell, endowed with an impish and histrionic genius. The most amusing things were told about the siege—of entertainments got up by the commander to keep up the spirits of the garrison, of a lady of title engaged in the womanly occupation of sniping at burghers, and finally of how the Boers had made a last desperate attempt to break through the defences, and how the wily Colonel had persuaded the victorious storming party, in a way that brooked no denial, to remain permanently inside as his guests.

When, shortly after this episode, Mafeking was relieved, the main army, after a long delay and one or two ugly reverses to its detached forces, was sweeping on, practically unopposed, to Pretoria. The war was going to turn out a good one after all, and was ending happily, on the best melodramatic lines, after just the right amount of thrills and anxieties. Accordingly the news that a relieving column had arrived at Mafeking had the effect of sending the country off its head with joy. It was the spirit of the now almost forgotten Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay resurrected in a wild, hysterical orgy of Sons of the Blood fraternizing and flag-waving and dancing in the streets for the edification of Lesser Breeds.

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The triumphant mood lasted long enough for Lord Salisbury's Government to go to the country with the slogan that every vote given to a Liberal was a vote given to the Boers, and to come back with another thumping majority. All the towns and railway lines were in the hands of the British; Kruger was an exile in Holland; and towards the end of the year Lord Roberts came home to receive a conqueror's ovation, leaving Kitchener to mop up the scattered commandos who still persisted in the criminal folly of not knowing when they were beaten. The business of mopping up had already been prolonged in the most annoying way. The Boer armies had broken up into mobile commandos, which were about as easy to find, on the vast expanse of the veldt, as the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay, and were not only able to strike, with telling effect, at the far-flung line of British communications, but actually to carry the war into British territory and kindle the fires of rebellion far and wide over the Cape Province. From a bewildered headquarters wild proclamations were issued on the Prussian model of 1870—farms to be burnt within a ten miles' radius of a cut railway, and so forth—which, though no serious attempt was made to act upon them, afforded excellent material for anti-British propaganda—and most of all in Germany. They might have been waste paper so far as the Boers were concerned.

What no one dreamed was that the business of conquering the Boers was not yet half-way through; that the climax of victory was but the prelude to an enormously prolonged anti-climax, in which all the spectacular honours would rest with the enemy, and the Boers would be displayed, in the eyes of a by no means unprejudiced world, as a band of heroic patriots defending their freedom, in the spirit of Hofer and William the Silent, against the overweening might of a world-empire. A more effective damper

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could not have been imagined to the mood of royster-
ing optimism that had prevailed in the nineties. A
chill wind of doubt had begun to stir in the dawn of
the new century. Of what graver trouble might this
one of South Africa be the harbinger?—what wars?
what social convulsions? what lean and bitter years?
Could it be that the clouds of darkness that had
troubled that forgotten crank in the *Prophetic Times*
were at last beginning to darken the sky, and that
there might come an end even to Progress?

This only Time could show, but to one personage
in the drama he had already shown more than enough.
The old Queen had been getting more and more
feeble in body, and her spirit had been cruelly torn
by the sufferings of her beloved soldiers. But that
spirit was as indomitable as ever, and it was the
Victoria who had defied Peel and stood up to Palmer-
ston, who curtly and indignantly took to task her
civilian War Minister for interfering with generals in
the field. "I am at a loss to understand what has
led you to send such a message to Lord Roberts.
He surely is the only judge of what is necessary,
and must not be interfered with by civilians at a
distance who cannot judge the exact state of the case.
. . . I must ask that such messages should not be
sent without my previous knowledge."¹ And Lady
Gwendolen Cecil informs us how Her Majesty, at
the darkest hour of the war, could reply to one of
her ministers, in the true Elizabethan vein: "There
is no one depressed in *this* house; we are not in-
terested in the possibilities of defeat; they do not
exist".

In the first month of the Twentieth Century, Lord
Roberts, back from the front, was bidden to an
interview with his Sovereign at Osborne. The two
old people must have had deep feelings in common,
for Lord Roberts was mourning the loss of an only

¹ *Lord Lansdowne: A Biography*, by Lord Newton, p. 180.

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son, shot down while earning the Victoria Cross in a forlorn hope to bring off Buller's lost guns at Colenso, and as for the Queen, the void left in her heart by her husband's death had never been filled. Her thoughts flowed naturally back to the old days—she was able to tell her visitor of what another of her captains, even more famous, had told her of his difficulties in the Peninsula. And then, when he had gone, she collapsed.

A few days later, messengers on bicycles were dashing through the streets of the neighbouring Cowes, raucously shouting to those who lined the pavements—"Queen's dead!"

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THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH

The
**VICTORIAN
AFTERMATH**

By Esmé
Wingfield-Stratford,
D.Sc., M.A.

New York *Mcmxxxiv*
WILLIAM MORROW & CO.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE DE VINNE PRESS, NEW YORK.

To
CAPTAIN B. H. LIDDELL HART
In Token of Friendship and Admiration

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INTRODUCTION

It is with some diffidence that I venture upon even the briefest introduction to the trilogy of which this is the concluding, though independent, volume. The historian who expounds his own philosophy risks coming under the same condemnation as the novelist who draws his own moral. I can only plead that I have been urged to do so by critics, on both sides of the Atlantic, whose authority it would be impertinent to disregard.

If I may be permitted to refer to a most helpful and suggestive criticism of *The Times Literary Supplement*, the demand is that I should pronounce a definite verdict on the age I have been depicting, and state the social and political philosophy on which it is based.

There is one danger in such a course of which my critic is no doubt aware. How many consciously philosophic historians have stood inviolate against the temptation of jamming their facts into a prepared framework of theory? The historian is a story-teller first and a philosopher afterwards. The moral should emerge from the tale—he who writes the tale to point a moral is on a par with the doubtless legendary Jesuit who tells lies in the cause of Truth. It is the historian's first duty to follow the facts without the faintest preconceived prejudice, wherever they may lead. So far from joining in Mr. Aldous Huxley's praise of Lytton Strachey's exquisite rightness in adding "a stroke or two to the portrait of his own contriving" to deepen the absurdity of a caricature, he will bear in mind that Clio, that stoic among the Muses, exacts from her servants that they shall sink even the artist in the truth-seeker.

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The history of Victorian and Edwardian England is essentially that of Western civilization in its latest and, not impossibly, its final phase. It was England that led the way in the conquest of matter by machine-power, England that became not only the workshop, but, at one time, the envy and to some extent the pattern of a world feverishly in process of mechanization. As indisputably as the eighteenth century belongs to France, so does the nineteenth to England. Her triumph and her failure, such as they were, were shared by that portion of the human species that, not by meekness, but by power, had come nigh to inheriting the earth. To all vital intents and purposes, England may therefore be regarded as the microcosmos of *Homo Sapiens*.

Civilized man may be compared to a patient who, after a long course of high living and shallow thinking, has had a sudden and almost fatal stroke. He has now so far recovered as to be up and about his normal avocations, but his health is far from restored, and has lately declined to a state approaching collapse. The symptoms that preceded the last stroke are only too plainly repeating themselves—that tell-tale flush is darker and angrier than in 1914. But so far from being warned by his last experience, the patient has not only gone back to his old courses, but has plunged into orgies of an extravagance beyond the wildest of his former dreams. Substitute new Fascism for old Prussianism, and the Ogpu for the Black Hundreds, and the analogy will be clear.

The present trilogy ends with the hour of the patient's first stroke. It aims at furnishing one aspect of a case history, on the basis of which a diagnosis may be arrived at. But, my critics ask, what is my own diagnosis? Though I cannot think that an answer is essential, I will do my best to give mine, for what it is worth.

Let me start from one fundamental assumption

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about the nature of all life, animal and vegetable no less than human. Life is a perpetual endeavour of the creature to adapt itself to environment. When environment changes and adaptation is successful, there is progress. When environment changes too fast or too abruptly for adaptation to keep pace with it, there is extinction.

We have no reason to believe that Man, by acquiring discourse of reason or lordship of the earth, has obtained exemption from a necessity that has been laid on all living creatures. History is strewn with the wreckage of civilizations that have failed to adapt themselves—failed, that is to say, to produce minds of the requisite wisdom or resource—and consequently gone under. Whether so unprecedented a catastrophe as the collapse of our present civilization, which has conquered or infected the whole world, would be followed by any rebuilding, or whether it would represent the definite failure of the human experiment, may be open to debate. But he would be rash indeed who would stake his hopes for the species on the chance of its muddling through, ultimately, in some unforeseen way.

It is from this standpoint that I have surveyed the Victorian Age and its aftermath. Only here a new and unprecedented factor has been introduced by Man himself into his agelong problem of adaptation. Not content with allowing his environment to transform itself in its own way and at its own pace, he has taken to himself the power of transforming it on a vast scale and with headlong rapidity. At the dawn of this age, we find him in the full swing of an Industrial Revolution, a transformation of his whole environment and conditions of life. That transformation has been going on at an accelerating pace ever since. The Victorians themselves already seem as distant to us as the Elizabethans did to them.

Unless the assumption from which we started is

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baseless, or unless, by some miracle, Man has been exempted from the law of all life, there was no escape, in the Victorian Age, from the necessity of a mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to that other revolution of environment. The penalty for failure could be none other than that which has overtaken every other defaulting species and civilization. For a few brief decades that penalty might be delayed, but evaded it could not be.

It would be false to say that the Victorians made no attempt whatever to meet the challenge of their environment. It was something that they should have made the real Victorian Age, which comprises the four mid decades of the nineteenth century, into one of the most brilliant periods of history. But they misconceived the nature and gravity of their task. The Victorian Tragedy, described in the first volume of this series,¹ is that of their failure to get to the root of any one of the main problems before them. In that book I likened the edifice of their civilization to William Beckford's splendid mansion at Fonthill, with its staggering proportions and lavish ornamentation, but without foundations—so that the whole thing ere long toppled in ruin. The Victorian Age was, to adopt a phrase of its own prophet, one of shams—its religion, its morality, its social system, whatever it had of philosophy, were the supports of a spiritual Fonthill, under the protection of a vast decency that forbade any probing into foundations or examination of fissures.

In *The Victorian Sunset*, which continues the story to the end of the reign, we see how these supports rotted or crumbled away. There was now no longer any pretence about foundations; the cracks were visible and increasing. Yet the building stood, in all its outward magnificence. While it continued to stand, its dwellers threw themselves with a feverish

¹ *Those Earnest Victorians.*

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zest into the enjoyment of what time they had left. They called for madder music and for stronger wine. They abandoned all thought of reconstruction. Waving their paper Union Jacks, and with an occasional sunflower in their buttonholes, they went mafficking down the primrose path to the strains of *Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay*. It was a reckless and frivolous time, this of the *fin de siècle*, fraught with tragic absurdity, and yet not without a certain fantastic charm.

In the present volume we see how the crash came—understand how it was bound to come. For the measureless catastrophe, whose beginning was the pistol shot at Serajevo and whose end may yet be the collapse of our civilization, is but the culmination, and in a sense the meaning, of the Victorian Tragedy. The title, *The Victorian Aftermath*, is, to my mind, one that just comprehends the significance of those thirteen and a half years that followed the Queen's death.

To those extreme sceptics who see in all that has come upon us the blind workings of chance, and hold that if such and such casual things had been done or left undone the War and all its consequences might have been averted, it is only possible to reply, in words once used by the Duke of Wellington, "If you can believe that, you can believe anything." To most who study or remember those pre-War years, the astonishing thing is that the catastrophe should have hung fire as long as it did. It was there, as palpably as the storm when the air is thunder-charged with electricity and the trees have begun to sway in the path of its approach. If I may venture to cite an experience of my own, it is only because I believe that there are scores of others who have recollections of the same kind. There comes back, out of that last midsummer of the peace, the memory of a dawn stealing up the Thames from Blackfriars to Westminster, and of the almost agonizing certainty of this being almost the last we should know of the old

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care-free civilization. Something was coming, palpably imminent. . . .

If we may accept the Hindu philosophy, nothing that ever happens to us is the result of chance, but is the Karma of our past actions working itself to fulfilment. Its coming is never from without but always from within, and it is not to be wondered at that in moments of heightened vision we should be conscious of its presence. Looked at in this light, much that seems incredible or fantastic is seen to fit into its place as if by necessity. To explain so measureless a catastrophe, no ordinary lapse will suffice. Or, to revert to the standpoint of the evolutionist, the failure of the creature to adapt itself to environment must have been of tragic completeness.

It is therefore as much beside the point to justify Victorian civilization by the imposing dignity of the crinoline age or the glittering prosperity of the *fin de siècle*, as it would have been to have enlarged upon the glories of Fonthill before the crash came, or on the high time the patient was having a week before the stroke.

I am aware that a plain, unvarnished account of the years immediately preceding the War reads rather like the chronicle of a vast asylum, even though the proceedings may appear sane and reasonable compared with what is going on to-day. But to those critics who would condemn the story out of hand, as a grotesque libel, I would offer the suggestion that had things been otherwise, what followed would have been wholly unaccountable. A healthy vine does not ordinarily assume the properties of a upas tree. If a number of prosperous gentlemen were to start cutting each others' throats, and wrecking all the luxurious furniture of their common abode, we might fairly assume that when, ten minutes before, they had sat politely glaring at each other and fingering their knives, they were not quite right in the head.

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If the facts have been doctored, it is by those who must needs force or pervert them into the framework of a conventional story. They are no doubt wise in their generation. As we draw near to our own time, every prominent figure, every institution and event, is charged with its proper emotional value. To give a perfectly truthful account of the political game in a country the majority of whose inhabitants are loyal supporters of one or the other team, is to run with eyes open against an invincible barrier of prejudice. In the greater part of Europe, already, the writing of any history but propagandist falsehood is persecuted as treason, and its publication impossible. Even in lands less nakedly barbarized, it is the way of prudence to tread on no toes and arouse no hostile reactions, to give to every Panjandrum his prescribed meed of honour, to take serious things with becoming seriousness, and to accept words—Christianity, for instance, or Liberal, or Science—at their market currency. That way is easy to tread, and to follow it is to ensure a reputation for taste and soundness. But at its end lies a history that is at its academic best an unprofitable bore, and at its popular worst ranks among the most insidious forms of mental poison.

Though I dare not hope to steer clear of all offence, I trust that I shall avoid the suspicion of holding a brief for any party or patriotism. To those whose own loyalties are already fixed, and whose passions are enlisted against anything that happens to conflict with them, I can only plead, in all humility, "Strike, but hear me!"

At least let it not be thought that truth and patriotism can ever be at variance. God forbid that any lover of England should think so lightly of her as to condescend, on her behalf, to the shifts of the special pleader, or that he should find no nobler grounds for his patriotism than in boasting of her superior bigness to the country of Shakespeare or her greater

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might than the realm of Alfred ! What is there more necessarily lovable in Empire than in elephantiasis ? England is a spirit, and it is in spirit and in truth that she demands to be worshipped. Were she to sink to whatever journalists understand by the status of a fifth-rate power, were her Empire to be dissolved and her very name erased from the map, her spirit, a spirit jealous of individual rights and capable of informing a free commonwealth of nations, might yet survive for the redemption of mankind from the new tyranny and the night of civilization. For it is only by fulfilment in a wider love that patriotism rises superior to an enormously multiplied selfishness, or that it comes to signify anything better to mankind than suicidal mania.

If I am asked for the moral of the story, I shall reply that, if it exists, it is open for every reader to draw it for himself. It is too much to expect of the mere story-teller that he should damn himself by crying in the wilderness "Repent and be saved !" or in the market-place, "Bring your minds up to the date of your machines !" It would, even so, require a more than common faith to conclude upon the assurance, "For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH

BOOK I
YEARS OF DISILLUSION

CHAPTER I
MARCIA FUNEBRE

IT would seem as if, in England, some special significance attached to the death of a Queen. "Queen Elizabeth's dead" is known to have been a *cliché* when Queen Anne was alive. And then, in her turn, good Queen Anne continued to die daily, long after people had ceased to remember much else about her. But when in the first dawn of the Twentieth Century the nation awoke to the consciousness that another English Queen had been gathered to her fathers, few of her subjects could have dared imagine that the news would ever come to be regarded as stale. For decades now "our gracious Queen" had ceased to be a woman of mortal clay, and had become as much of a symbolic figure as Britannia herself. And it was as a symbolic event of immense significance, that the final wearing out of her poor old brain cells was felt and deplored. It was not Victoria that was dead, but something with which her name and reign would forever be associated, some guarantee of safety, of permanence, of assured progress.

Never was there a more impressive pageant than that of the great Queen's last journey from the *chapelle ardente* at Osborne to St. George's Chapel at Windsor, its temporary resting-place on the way to her husband's side beneath the dome at Frogmore. But that last brief stage was accomplished in the privacy of family mourning—appropriately so, because it was

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not the little woman in the coffin whose passing had drawn vast crowds to stand in awestruck silence under a bleak February sky, but something more like that procession of the lost hours, bearing Time to his tomb in eternity. It was the nineteenth century that was heard passing in the rumble of the gun-carriage wheels, attended by all the pomp and majesty of an old order that was already beginning to yield place to new.

It was an order hedged by the divinity that still attached to the persons of Kings. No doubt Divine Right was not what it had been in the days when *Le Roi Soleil* had included the State, and the Merry Monarch had healed with his touch. But Royalty was still felt to be the glittering varnish on the surface of society, that preserved things as they were from the approaches of dry rot. There, behind the coffin, rode the new King, the Albert Edward whose pleasure-hunting career had set the heads of all the Holy Willies shaking for decades, but who now, as Edward VII—and in spite of his portly figure—looked the very picture of royal dignity. He at least could greet the new age with a superb gesture, for had he not ordered the Royal Standard to be hoisted to full mast height on the yacht that had borne his mother's remains, through long booming lines of warships, to Portsmouth Harbour? "The King lives," he had said, as if to imply that this darkening of the Victorian sky was no more than the passing of a cloud at high noon.

By his side rode a younger monarch, whose superb and perhaps, to English eyes, slightly sinister appearance, attracted hardly less public curiosity than that of Edward himself. This was the German Emperor, who had, ever since his Kruger telegram, five years before, been the butt of every cartoonist in the country, and whose failure to hit it off with his English uncle was something more than suspected. But for

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the moment the nephew had almost won his way back to popularity. He had rushed away from some festival of Prussian pageantry that had been staged for his benefit, in order that he might be present at the last moments of the grandmother whom—as far as his nature was capable of any constant emotion—he loved and revered. She had died, literally, in his arms. When, on his arrival in London, some bold spirit in the crowd had stepped up to the royal carriage with a “Thank you, Kaiser,” Uncle Edward had turned graciously to assure him that the English people would never forget this visit of his. The same mood of cordiality lasted long enough for the Emperor, before his return, to wax eloquent about the happy relations that ought to exist between the two great Teutonic Powers. But the press had not been invited; the speech got badly reported, and the orator took umbrage. By such *contretemps*, in this strange upper world of ceremonial and make-believe, might civilization be brought nearer to the abyss.

There were humbler kings riding behind, those of Portugal and Greece, both destined to end their reigns by assassination. Behind them came a carriage out of which beamed the patriarchal features of Leopold, King of the Belgians, who might have put in a fair claim for the title of the wickedest old man alive—indisputably his, if wickedness is to be estimated by its effects in human misery. This amiable potentate, although nearer seventy than sixty, was so troubled by his reproductive instincts that he had actually retained the services of a concubine on his visit, an impropriety that—even more than the financing of love’s elderly dream by the depopulation of the vast Congo Province—confirmed his Cousin of England in the resolve that this visit should be Leopold’s last. Among the crowd of lesser royalties figured a bull-necked, eupeptic individual just verging on middle-

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age, the Archduke who was afterwards to be launched into fame and eternity at Serajevo.

The ceremony was not only royal, but military. The seemliness of this no one would have dreamed of questioning, least of all the old Queen, who had been as fond of a scarlet uniform as the humblest housemaid among her subjects, and who, with characteristic attention to detail, had left precise directions concerning the manner of her obsequies. Nothing would serve for a hearse but a gun-carriage, or rather, three successive gun-carriages, and they were draped with the khaki of militant imperialism. The whole way was lined with soldiers with reversed arms—except when some Eton boy volunteers, in their eagerness to see the show, forgot to reverse¹—and military bands reiterated the strains of Handel's and Chopin's death marches. Even the impressive silence, that the multitude spontaneously preserved, was broken by a muffled and involuntary cheer when the venerable figure of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, fresh from his supposed conquest of the South African Republics, was seen in the procession.

Just as in the Prince Consort's Great Exhibition of 1851 the whole emphasis had been laid upon peaceful progress, and the union of the civilized world by the free exchange of its kindly fruits, so now, half a century later, it seemed quite natural for the funeral of his widow to take the form of a gigantic advertisement of an Empire in arms. Those lines of ships, through which *The Victoria and Albert* had passed, were useless for any other purpose than that of destruction. Those reversed arms were contrivances for extinguishing life at a maximum of speed and distance. The very gun-carriage that looked so pathetically small and isolated was but part of a machine for the destruction of man and all his works. The royalties and other leading performers in the

¹ *The End of a Chapter* by Shane Leslie, p. 78.

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ceremony had to be dressed up in military uniforms. But even if the creative as well as the destructive forces of Empire had been deemed worthy of representation, it is certain that neither Lister nor Kelvin, Watts nor Swinburne, would have provoked such untimely applause as that which greeted the appearance of "Bobs."

Little more than three years previously there had been another great advertisement of Empire, as like in spirit as a festival can be to a funeral. That was when Her Majesty had been driven through the streets of this same London to thank God for her Diamond Jubilee. But if the spirit was the same, there was a subtle difference in effect between the first pageant and the second, a difference especially perceptible to the foreign participants, and perhaps most of all to that inscrutably observant rider at the new King's side. Then the advertisement had passed at its face value; everybody had been impressed by so vast a display of power and magnificence. But now—there was a breath of doubt beneath those February skies. The Empire had not been seen to the best advantage of late. The test of war had been applied, with results most unflattering to imperial self-esteem.

The whole strength of the Empire, at home and overseas, had so far proved insufficient to crush a few thousand Dutch farmers fighting for their independence, and though popular song might characterize "dear old Bobs" as "the little tradesman who does all the thickest jobs," it was becoming painfully apparent that he had come home from South Africa with the thickest part of that job still on the hands of his successor. Another rider in the procession was the aged Duke of Cambridge, who for thirty-nine years as Commander-in-Chief had concentrated his attention on keying up the army to the perfect performance of such ceremonial as it was engaged upon at this very moment. What else he had taught

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it might be—or at least was, on the Continent—judged by the numerous reverses, fiascos, and surrenders to which an unfriendly press did something more than justice.

Even before the war, the Empire had been pretty generally disliked beyond its own confines. The most successful player in a skin game is not apt to be popular with his competitors. But the English spirit, in those aggressive nineties, had been proof against hatred. It was rather a compliment, if you chose to look on it that way, of the lesser breed to an unwillingly acknowledged superior. But now there was a lack of respect more galling than that of love. In one of those witty cartoons that soothed the *amour propre* of the most polite nation in the world, Queen Victoria had been represented as the fat woman of a fair, being prodded, in a far from delicate manner, by President Kruger, with the object of demonstrating that the fat is padding—her greatness and her country's a sham. The same taunt was being whispered, and more than whispered, in a Germany that was already beginning to weave theories about the racial superiority of the pure Teuton, and to dream dreams about a new Punic War, with degenerate Britain in the rôle of Carthage. More significant than any froth of Parisian bad manners were the cheers that greeted the Queen's death when it was announced to a theatre audience at Munich, and the cries of "Down with England!" in the Parliament House at Vienna.

But these were after all foreigners, whose jealousy might be presumed. It was a more serious matter that England should show signs of losing confidence in herself, that even patriotism should take the form of nagging. Here are a few sub-headings from the contents of one ultra-patriotic brochure called *Efficiency and Empire*¹: "Evidences of British Degeneracy

¹ By Arnold White.

apparent to Foreigners—The Evaporation of Elementary Morality—English Agriculture disappearing—Indiscriminate Mercy universally approved—Loss of Stamina in the English Populace—Universal Hostility to England evidence of the Incompetence of her Rulers”—and so on, and so forth, until one wonders how any son of the Blood overseas, after reading this kind of thing, could have wanted to maintain the connection with the Mother Country for a day longer.

Even this is tame stuff compared with an anonymous book that appeared in the month of the Queen's funeral, and did so well that a second edition was called for in the following month. Its title, *Drifting*, is splashed in flaming scarlet across a khaki-coloured binding, and its theme is the degeneracy of England, whose people won't fight except with their mouths, whose tradesmen sell arms to the enemy and brown-paper boots to the army, whose industries, thanks to "a commercial policy of absolute indifference and indolence," show "an enormous and continuous decline," and whose statesmanship, in contrast with the healthy realism of the Continental brand, is marked by flabby altruism—as witnessed by her support of the oppressed Armenians, thereby alienating her good friends the Turks, and driving them into the outstretched arms of Germany, for "practical politics," our author informs us, "are not dictated by lofty sentiment, but by sordid motives of interest"—and so, he evidently thinks, they jolly well ought to be.

The most unkindest cut of all came not from any obscure journalist, but from the accredited bard of Empire, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who headed the chorus of Jeremiahs with a furious rhymed Philippic, in which he held up that still considerable majority of Sons of the Blood, who were not domiciled overseas, to the contempt and derision of a delighted world. He did not stop short at mere abuse, but plainly indicated the awful fate in store for these "flannelled

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fools" and "muddled oafs," these "poor, little street-bred people," these worshippers of "talking fetishes," when the "low, red line to Southward" indicated the approach of an invading army—quite obviously a French army—destined to bring the few survivors "under the yoke." If Mr. Kipling had waited another couple of years before putting on the black cap, his low, red line would have shifted to Eastward.

Poor old England had still one consolation. Let the heathen rage never so furiously and the prophets thunder never so loudly, there was still the fleet. Britannia indubitably ruled the waves. The misfortunes of poor Tommy on the veldt had done nothing to shake the national faith in Jack, the Handy-man, who, at a critical moment, had come to the rescue of the army, and taken on the Boer Long Tom at Ladysmith with his own 4.7s. It would have delighted the old Queen's heart to know that her blue-jackets were destined to come to the rescue, and provide an unrehearsed climax for her funeral pageant. For when the royal train arrived at Windsor Station, it was found that the artillery horses provided for the third and final gun-carriage had become so restive as to be unmanageable. As they plunged about, there seemed every prospect of a ghastly accident to the coffin. But somebody had a brilliant idea; the horses were taken away, ropes were attached, and a detachment of sailors, suddenly transformed from the ornamental to the useful, dragged their Sovereign's remains up the sharp rise to the chapel, whither, almost at the same time of year, a few loyal followers had brought King Charles the Martyr, and where so many of her predecessors lay sleeping.

There, after a service in which the leading dignitaries of the land and the flower of its nobility were crowded to the utmost capacity of pew space, they left the little coffin lying before the altar, and life, for the multitudes who had witnessed this last of their

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Queen's progresses, resumed its normal course, in a world in which Victoria was at last as dead as Anne and Elizabeth. And this, to the philosophic mind, might be deemed of greater wonder and significance than the pageant itself—for not the least important things are those which no historian thinks of recording because they are taken as matters of course. Life goes on. These multitudes—all but a few hopeless derelicts—sit down to an evening meal, brought them they know not whence; are housed and clothed according to their degree; find themselves entitled each to his portion, vast or exiguous, of the fruits of other men's labour; toil, luxuriate, and reproduce their kind, in the faith that the social system of which they are part will continue to function with the same regularity as the motions of the sun. Perhaps the faintest shiver of doubt may have awakened at the consciousness that Queen Victoria was no more, but there was something very reassuring in the spectacle of her funeral. Life went on in all its splendour and safety. The King lived.

CHAPTER II

AN AGE OF NERVES

And now that the last honours had been rendered to the Victorian Age, there was a reaction from mourning, a strengthening conviction that it was good to be alive and in the dawn of a new century. Everybody was agreed that the nineteenth had been pre-eminently the wonderful century; most would have added that the twentieth was bound to be more wonderful still, because it was in the nature of progress to go on and on *ad infinitum*. It was a simple matter of figures. So long as men had gone on estimating things in terms of spiritual values, you could never be certain of the future. That greater geniuses than Shakespeare or greater Saviours than Christ would materialize in each successive generation might be hard to prove. But it was quite safe to say that the motor-car of 1910 would be an improvement on that of 1901, and yet not quite so good as that of 1920. In the conquest of matter by science, the present is always the culminating moment, and you can be as certain of the future being still better as you are of the past having been worse. Chance and mortality were thus eliminated from human calculations—the car of progress had no reverse gear.

The man in the street, at the time of the Queen's funeral, if he had been asked what science had done for him in the last ten years, would probably have cited the motor-car and the phonograph, and might possibly have added wireless telegraphy and X-rays, none of which had yet begun to affect his daily life

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to any appreciable extent. He would almost certainly have ignored the numberless technical improvements, in every department of mechanical industry, which, because they made no strong emotional appeal, were not stunted in the press, but the cumulative effect of which was to provide him with a radically different environment from that of his fathers, and consequently to make the most exacting demands on his powers of adaptation.

Everywhere new materials were coming into use—steel framework for buildings, with concrete, galvanized iron, and other compositions to rival stone, slate, and brick; artificial fabrics for clothes; synthetic products for food, along with a vast extension of the canning industry; most of the familiar articles of daily life turned out cheap and pretty, thanks to the ingenuity of the chemist in compounding substitutes for the few simple and solid raw materials of the old-time craftsman and manufacturer.

But the change of environment that most directly affected the ordinary man was one not of substance, but of pace. It was as if, since the eighteenth century, the pace of life had been quickened up from a dignified *adagio* to a thundering *prestissimo*. One of the favourite words of the time was "hustle." The most approved of all ambitions was to break a record, preferably for speed. Railway companies eagerly competed against each other for the longest and fastest runs, and it was considered a point of national honour to build the biggest and most gaudily luxurious floating hotels, to rush tourists and business men in the shortest possible time between the murk and mud of Lancashire and the budding skyscrapers of New York. The cheapening of travel facilities enabled people to get about, and abroad, to an extent that had never been dreamed of in mid-Victorian times. And now the bicycle provided multitudes with an individual freedom and mobility that the coming of

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the motor-car was destined to increase beyond all hitherto imaginable bounds.

A great and steadily growing majority of the people were now town dwellers, who depended for the necessities of life upon a world-wide system of supply and distribution. Life in these towns, for a creature whose bodily frame was adapted to a struggle with raw Nature for her fruits, could not fail to be highly artificial. It was true that the enormous maladjustments of creature to environment that had shortened and stunted life in the days of the early factory system were so remote from twentieth-century conditions as to seem almost incredible. A long course of cumulative legislation had humanized life in the factories; sanitation had advanced with great strides in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; the housing problem had at last begun to be recognized and seriously taken in hand; municipal patriotism expressed itself in the erection of stately, or showy, public buildings, and the provision of open spaces. The effect of these changes was at least to postpone any sensational or obvious breakdown in the experiment of human aggregation on so vast a scale. But it was open to doubt whether the nature of the main problem had been realized at all, or more than the surface of it touched.

What was the effect of the new conditions of life on the nature of the average human being, and to what extent had that nature adapted itself, or been adapted, thereto? One thing at least was certain, that by the wage-earning class, the country life was not generally regarded as preferable to that of the streets. The difficulty was to keep the enterprising or capable young worker, of either sex, away from the town. The country was felt to lack excitement and variety. The town pulsed; the village stagnated. It was better to breathe smoke and have one's vision bounded by walls, than to suffer boredom. And life

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in the villages, in the dawn of the twentieth century, touched the nadir of boredom. Agricultural depression weighed heavily upon the land. The continuity of tradition was broken; immemorial customs and amenities had ceased to be honoured by a semi-literate generation, and country life tended to become a pale imitation of town life.

The town dweller, in a machine age, had to adapt himself, as best he might, to an environment startlingly different from that of previous generations. The very atmosphere was vitiated by the smoke of domestic coal-fires and factory chimneys, which not only clogged and poisoned the lungs, but also interfered with the hitherto free gift of God's sunshine. And as the light of day was dimmed, so was the darkness of night driven from the streets by lamps of continually increasing brilliance. The moon had ceased to be the parish lantern; its changes were no longer observed, and its appearance, at the end of a street vista, was liable to be confounded with that of a sky sign. At hop-picking time, when hordes of town dwellers were crowded into huts and encampments near the scene of their labours, it was a source of no small relief to the owners of hen-roosts and orchards that the terror of darkness kept most of the visitors from the temptation of nocturnal marauding.

Human nature, that had evolved in so different an environment, had now suddenly to accommodate itself to that of the modern industrial community. If we are to regard life as a continual sequence of stimulus and response, we can best express the situation by saying that the rate of stimulus was enormously quickened without any corresponding change in the faculty of response. There was little opportunity for that reposefulness—or perhaps slowness—of mind, that is the heritage of the yokel; the broad horizons were walled off; the din and bustle of pavements, the necessity of continual alertness, contrasted with

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the peace of the lanes through which Hodge trudged home from farm or field. Factory work, even if it only consisted in the repetition of some Robot process, demanded a constant keying-up of the attention. Minding a power-driven machine was a very different proposition from milking a cow, or even driving a straight furrow. The intensive standardization of the highly paid American worker was still in the future, but the acceptance of Our Ford's gospel—as Mr. Aldous Huxley would no doubt call it—was as inevitable, sooner or later, in England, as any other development of industrial progress.

The modern machine worker, who continually more closely approximated to the status of a machine part, turning out products that he seldom saw completed, to produce dividends in which he did not share, for limited liability companies towards which his trades union encouraged him in an attitude of class-conscious hostility, naturally demanded to fill his leisure with relaxation hectic enough to compensate for workaday conditions. This led to a development of vicarious sport that recalled the rivalry of Greens and Blues at Byzantium. In the neighbourhood of football grounds, on Saturday afternoons, might have been heard a fierce continuous roar, that rose and fell upon the breeze as this or that team of hired experts seemed to obtain an advantage. The mental dope provided by bookie and tipster for people who, as these gentlemen would have put it, didn't know a horse from a bullock, accounted for an ever-increasing drain of wages. And when gas and electricity took the place of sunlight, there were the music-halls, which, like the football clubs, had become highly capitalized professional entertainments, and had entirely ceased to be the old-fashioned singing and drinking clubs. There were, of course, the melodrama, and even before the end of the nineteenth century, the moving picture, or vitascope, was being exhibited as the latest curiosity.

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Again there was the annual holiday, most often at seaside towns, with swarms of people hiding the beach, and every sort of cheap and standardized amusement provided. Here, very often, and particularly in the North, the savings of a whole year would be joyously dissipated in a few crowded hours, or days, of life that was felt, by contrast, to be glorious.

There is no more easily abused word than "natural," but if we may be permitted to describe as unnatural a life violently conflicting with the previously acquired constitution and habits of any creature, surely this way of life of the industrial worker would appear as unnatural as that of a wild beast in the zoo. The same could be said about the black-coated city worker, passing his days in a town office and his nights in a suburban villa, a not inconsiderable portion of his time being spent in a packed railway carriage, getting to and fro between them.

The drumfire bombardment of stimulus to which mankind was subjected in a machine age was vastly intensified by the use of mass suggestion. Almost everybody, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was able to read, and the output of reading matter was continually being increased by invention. It was still the fashion to talk about the now superseded taxes on newspapers as taxes on knowledge, as if to impart knowledge were the prime function of the printed page. Any journalist might have known better. For every column that set out to reason or to inform, there must have been hundreds devoted entirely to assaults, in one form or another, on the emotions. Stimulus was applied to produce certain desired responses, the human machine, unlike the station automatic, being supplied with goods in order to produce pennies from the slot.

We have seen how the craving for stimulus was fostered by the conditions of modern life. It was the business of the journalist and the advertiser not only to pander to that craving, but actually to create it.

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The town dweller, who might see the sky seldom and the horizon never, did not feel the loss, since for a penny or a halfpenny he could be transported to a world of thrilling incident the like of which never was on sea or land. Everything that went on in this world was delightfully simple, and could be followed without the least straining of the attention. The tired worker could lie in bed, if he chose, on Sunday, and read highly seasoned accounts of all the foulest crimes and divorces of the past week, voluminous sporting chronicles, a miscellany of horrors, accidents and misleading intelligence about "Society", together with one or two inconspicuous and garbled snippets of what might, in the ordinary sense, be described as news. This last he could obtain from his daily paper, which, under the auspices of the new journalism, he could now purchase for a halfpenny. Here everything was made as hitting and sensational as possible, the appeal being directed straight to the emotions, and every demand for concentrated thought carefully avoided. Parliamentary debates were boiled down to a few snappy sentences, foreign affairs were rendered palatable by crude appeals to national egotism, and the course of human history presented in the form of a sensational melodrama, every episode of which is punctuated by the cheers or hisses of the audience. Nations became persons, not the mixed characters of real life, but the heroes and villains of the Surrey-side stage, though even a Surrey-side audience would have boggled—as that of the *Daily Mail* did not when France was in question—at the villain who had been booed outrageously in one scene, figuring in the next as the immaculate hero, and being pelted with flowers instead of vegetables. So, too, vital but complex economic problems, on which the audience would have to pronounce a verdict at the polls, were presented to them in the form of childish but passion-rousing slogans.

Modern man's environment is not only constituted

by the things he sees and experiences directly. He lives in a world of images, transmitted through the medium of the printed word, or picture, for in 1903 a new epoch in journalism was opened by Harmsworth's *Daily Mirror*, which originally started and failed as a woman's paper, but achieved a wonderful success when it was transformed into a daily paper with pictures instead of news as the principal attraction. The dweller in the great industrial city has not even that saving contact with nature that is the lot of the countryman. From his earliest infancy his nerves are battered into a state of acute suggestibility. He accepts a melodrama world that is presented to him in a series of violent shocks, as if he were holding the end of an electric wire, of which someone is continually switching on the current, and he reacts with corresponding violence and lack of discrimination.

Thus we find the man in the street, at the beginning of the twentieth century, pitchforked into an environment utterly different from that to which successive generations of his ancestors had adapted themselves, and one that made incalculably more exacting demands upon his own powers of adaptation. Of the necessity of consciously adapting his nature to so revolutionary a change, he had scarcely the faintest inkling. Nevertheless, some sort of change was forced upon him, whether he willed it or no. The machinery of stimulus and response functions by means of a nervous system whose ramifications extend all over the body. It is only to be expected that if the demands on this system are suddenly increased beyond all precedent, and if the tempo of life is continually being speeded up, the nerves will be unequal to the strain put upon them. And this is what we do find.

It may be said, in more than the purely medical sense, that it was the machine age that discovered nerves. As late as the eighteenth century, they were seldom heard of, because, like good servants, they

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went about their offices unobtrusively. If any one of us could be transported back into that time, what would amaze him most would be the toughness of men and women under conditions that, to us, would be sheerly intolerable. What must have been the sum of agony arising from teeth, in the days when dentistry was a torture to the rich and unknown to the poor? What from septic surgery, when anæsthetics were unknown, and operations were facilitated by a dozen or so burly ruffians holding down or sitting on the patient, while the doctor grubbed about with dirty fingers in his inside? Consider what life on a warship must have been in the days when food was scarce and almost uneatable, when crews were riddled with venereal disease, when discipline was enforced by constant blows of the rattan, and by formal and ferocious floggings at which it was often the expressed wish of the captain to see the man's backbone. No crew upon the seas to-day would survive such an existence physically, just as very few modern boys would live through a year of—we do not say such an establishment as that of Mr. Squeers, but even the old Long Chamber at Eton. And yet our ancestors seem to have taken these things quite comfortably in their stride, and to have made no great fuss about adapting themselves to them.

John Bull, in particular, had prided himself upon his phlegm. Even during his great struggle against Napoleon he had never got unduly excited—for when England was left alone against a Europe in alliance with, or subservient to, that seemingly invincible conqueror, national life went on very much as usual, and there was no serious question of a peace on any basis of which Napoleon would have been likely to approve. Even Waterloo produced no outburst of undignified hysterics. But during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, unmistakable signs were to be described of the national temperament having become,

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for the first time, definitely neurotic. The tendency to get wildly excited on the least provocation, even if this should be no more than the sale of one of the zoo elephants, was very marked, and in the nineties came the outburst of music-hall patriotism and Empire boosting, many of whose recorded utterances read to us now like the ravings of lunacy. During the South African War this neurosis reached the pitch of unmistakable hysteria, of the kind that gave birth to the expression "to maffick." There was far more fuss about a check to two or three brigades on the Tugela, than there had been over the disaster of Walcheren or the surrender of Yorktown. Wellington, after all his victories, never had an ovation to compare with that accorded to a battalion of suburban volunteers, who came home after less than a year, having taken part in no serious fighting and having suffered fewer casualties than resulted from the orgy of their homecoming.

These were not the only indications that England was becoming a nation with nerves, a nation morbidly responsive to mass suggestion and extravagant in its responses. The day was already beginning to dawn of what was known, with accuracy, as the craze. The nineteen-hundreds were to see many such outbursts—ping-pong, treasure-hunting, diabolos, and all sorts of more or less honest competitions, harmless in themselves and useful to the skilled advertisers who knew how to exploit them, but unmistakably symptomatic of the ease with which mass suggestion could be applied. There were other ways which were not harmless at all. It might be a paying journalistic proposition to work up hysterical excitement and panic against the imaginary beings who were supposed to represent foreign nations. It might be possible to inflame already existing hatreds to the pitch of civil war. It might even be possible to repeat on a free and democratic electorate the experiment of Gadara.

CHAPTER III

TORY SUPREMACY

It is largely a reaction against nervous instability that accounts for the trust reposed in those who are believed to be without nerves. A public that demands to be stimulated by hectic literature is unanimous in its admiration of the strong, silent hero, precisely because its members feel themselves to be neither strong nor silent. And so, with men in the mass, every access of neurosis enhances the value set upon phlegmatic leaders. It is the desire of the ivy for the tower, of the *malade imaginaire* for the specialist. Not that the phlegmatic are the only leaders in demand. The modern public wants stimulus as well as safety. In politics, if not in cricket, its ideal combination is that of slogger and stone-waller. Fortunate indeed is the ministerial team that is equally strong in both these contrasted elements!

This may partly explain the strength of the Conservative Ministry that was swept into power by so overwhelming a majority in 1895, and was returned at the khaki election of 1900 with that majority substantially intact. The most conspicuous figure in that Ministry, the driving force of the whole combination, was the leader of militant imperialism, Joseph Chamberlain. Few contemporary observers doubted that this man was destined, at no distant date, to assume the premiership to which his genius entitled him. Not even his enemies—and they were legion—dared belittle his importance. It was at his eyeglass, as a sort of bull's-eye, that shafts of anti-British invective and satire were aimed from every part of the civilized

world. To hate the Empire was to detest its apostle. It was only natural, under these circumstances, that those who believed in the Empire should believe with equal fervour in the personality and gospel of "Joe"

But was brilliance the only quality that the electorate demanded of its statesmen? The man in the street might wax enthusiastic for Chamberlain, but did he trust him in quite the same way as he trusted Lord Salisbury and the Duke of Devonshire? The mere presence of these statesmen at the head of affairs gave him an indefinable sense of security. They were survivals from an age that had already become legendary. They stood apart, sufficient unto themselves, following the way of life traditional to their class, without the least self-consciousness or regard for popular sentiment. The gusts of mass suggestion, that swayed the democracy like reeds, moved them not at all. They did not get excited when the public was excited. If they ever condescended to get excited at all, it would be over something quite trivial and personal, such as the landing of a particularly big salmon or a pig taking a prize at a show. And even that excitement was not very keen.

These elder statesmen were, in fact, slightly bored with life, and particularly with modern life. Lord Salisbury could not even be troubled to recognize members of his Cabinet or to keep tryst with the Kaiser; the Duke of Devonshire could yawn in the midst of one of his own speeches, and remain playing bridge at White's oblivious of the fact that he had bidden his Sovereign to dine at Devonshire House. Even Death was not a visitor who impressed them particularly with his terrors. They robbed him of his sting by circumlocutions. "I think," said the Duke of Devonshire, in one of his last letters, "a big speech would settle me."¹ This is similar to a reported,

¹ *Life of the Duke of Devonshire* by Bernard Holland, Vol. II, p. 412.

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and certainly most characteristic, utterance of the dying Edward VII, "If this goes on much longer I shall be done for." More pungent, and racy of the hunting field, is a remark of the octogenarian Marquis of Abergavenny, the intimate friend of Disraeli and the puller of innumerable party wires, concerning a request that he should accept the headship of some local Conservative body—"An old fellow like me wants a bit of rest before he goes to ground." And surely no last recorded words were ever more expressive of the speaker's whole personality than those murmured by the only half-conscious Duke of Devonshire, "Well, the game is over, and I am not sorry."¹

Since the Pudding Age of Walpole there had never been a time when unimaginative solidity had counted for so much. It was always the brilliant man that went under, when he was rash enough to challenge a direct conflict. It was Hartington's² secession that broke the power of Gladstone and ushered in the long period of Tory supremacy. Lord Randolph Churchill, who seemed marked out as the leader of a regenerated Toryism, had crumpled up and disappeared when he had tried to force the hand of Salisbury. The equally brilliant Rosebery had found his position, as Gladstone's successor, impossible when his leadership proved distasteful to so hard-bitten an old political stager as Sir William Harcourt, and when a canny but quite undistinguished Scot was available to take his place.

We can only guess at what thoughts were passing in the mind of the brilliant and ambitious Colonial Secretary, but he would have been more than human had he appreciated the strength that the Government derived from its ballast of safe and solid men. Those political investors who liked to take up a speculative stock might trust their all to Joe, but there were others

¹ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

² Lord Hartington became Duke of Devonshire in 1891.

whose British caution preferred the safe and low yields of the Devonshire and Salisbury debentures. And what investor does not gain an added confidence from the presence of a few titled magnates on a Board of Directors?

Lord Salisbury's Government was, indeed, to all outward appearance, stronger than ever at the opening of the new reign. The mandate of the electorate had been of extraordinary decisiveness in 1895, but that such a mandate should have been renewed after five years' experience was more extraordinary still, and might have been taken to indicate a settled preference for a Conservative regime. But in 1900 the mood of the country was neither settled nor normal, but one of hectic nationalism, inflamed by war-fever, and it was rushed by a party manoeuvre, almost amounting to the confidence trick, into the belief that the victory was as good as won, and that it only remained to secure its fruits by a popular mandate. It was notorious that the Liberals were for letting the Boers off lightly—perhaps without even annexing their country. Accordingly it was the easiest thing in the world to get away with the suggestion that every vote given to a Liberal was a vote given to the Boers. It was no less easy to concentrate the whole attention of the electorate upon this one issue, so that the Government was, in effect, asking the patriotic voter to do his bit for his country by authorizing the ministers who had won the war to carry on for the next seven years in any way they might think fit. Having thus chosen in haste, he would have leisure to discover that the war had not been won, nor—as reckoned by time—half won. Even so the problems which Parliament would have on its hands, once the mess had been cleared up, would be those of peace.

What guarantee had the electorate that the Cabinet had any plan of campaign for restoring the home front? Or that every vote given to a Unionist would not be a vote for marking time or naked reaction?

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There was an answer to this question, but not of the sort that gets into print or political speeches. Of all European peoples, none has been more naturally conservative than the English, more generous of its loyalty to leaders it has accounted worthy. The Englishman proverbially loves a lord, nor is such love necessarily ignoble. There is as much of romance in it as of snobbery. The cabby, who would inform his fare, with due adjectival embellishment, that he was no gentleman, was at least paying the homage of his order to the normal or ideal gentleman. He would never have said "You ain't no coloured plutocrat," or "unnatural millionaire." Inarticulate John Bull, if he could have explained his preference for the leadership of men like Lord Salisbury and the Duke, might have urged that they were the pick of a class of sportsmen and good fellows, men who could not be bought, and with a long tradition of social service behind them. Honest John had too much prudence, or too little imagination, to look for a new social Jerusalem descending ready-made from a Marxian or any other heaven; he preferred to see the existing order run decently and improved gradually. But he did demand of his leaders that they should play the game for the side and not too obviously for themselves. Moreover, he was capable of judging their leadership by its fruits, and if the tree proved obstinately barren he might, though with reluctance, have recourse to the axe.

There was of course a difference between the rural mentality and that of the town workers, who hardly ever set eyes on a squire, and whose natural loyalty was to trades unions in which a militant class consciousness was fostered. Yet even to these the Unionist cause was capable of appealing. The prestige of aristocratic leaders is not necessarily diminished because they are not seen with the physical eye, but have their images impressed on the mind by dint

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of lord-worshipping journalism. Of what this sort of suggestion was capable is seen in the adoration, unprecedented in the palmiest days of Divine Right, lavished on royalty, the avidity with which the most trivial reported utterances or doings of its members were perused, the tempest of enthusiasm with which a visiting Majesty or Highness was sure to be greeted. And it might well be that many an honest artisan took the wisdom of a distant Duke on trust with his beard, and would be more inclined to trust such an ideal being at the head of affairs than Bill This or Jim That whose human failings were masked by no such romantic illusion.

It may be conceded that, in the towns, this Conservative romanticism struck less deep roots than in the countryside. But the Government had another string to its bow, for in the towns was the fertile soil of the new Unionism, with which the name of Chamberlain was associated. This partly consisted in a strong emotional appeal to a militant nationalism that in one form or another was rampant among civilized nations, an appeal enhanced by the glamour and novelty of a world-wide Empire. But Chamberlain was too much of a business man, and too convinced a social reformer, to trust in any kind of sentiment that failed to yield substantial returns. It must be brought home to the working man that his Empire was a paying proposition, that for taking up the white man's burden he might reap his reward in employment and high wages. What form this demonstration would take, and how far it would be convincing to the potent, grave, and reverend signors who were Chamberlain's colleagues, a not very distant future would reveal.

It was a powerful bid that the Unionist Party was making for the permanent control of British democracy. Its ideal, inherited from Disraeli, was one of a government in the best sense aristocratic, based on popular support, and progressive on evolutionary

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lines. But between dream and reality loomed one gigantic note of interrogation. No doubt Disraeli had judged his new electorate rightly in its capacity to follow worthy leadership. But was such leadership certain to be forthcoming? The new age presented social problems of an ever-increasing complexity, problems that demanded the highest intellectual qualities for their solution. Mere unintelligent straightforwardness was not enough; the demand was for something more akin to Plato's government by the philosophic cream of the community. Where in the public school education that everybody pretending to be an English gentleman had to undergo was the training for such leadership to be obtained? Statesmanlike wisdom is hardly what we should expect as a by-product from a manufactory of sportsmen.

But even from the intellectual standpoint, Lord Salisbury might have accounted himself fortunate in the personnel of his colleagues. He himself was not only capable of functioning worthily in the Presidential Chair of the British Association, but was the father of conspicuously talented children. His Cabinet included more than one former member of that group, nicknamed the Souls, which had made a splendid though short-lived effort, in the eighties, to achieve a Society that should be at once sport-loving and intellectual. Among these were his philosopher nephews, Arthur and Gerald Balfour, and the newly appointed Irish Secretary, George Wyndham, whose brilliant and graceful personality might equally well have adorned the symposia of Lorenzo de' Medici and the circle of Dr. Johnson.

It remained to be seen whether such leaven would prove capable of leavening the whole lump of a public-school bred upper class, and provide leadership capable of establishing that class's supremacy upon an enduring basis of proletarian confidence.

CHAPTER IV
ANTICLIMAX IN KHAKI

Whatever faith the ordinary man may have had in gentlemanly leadership must have been severely shaken by the experience of the South African War. The army was the very citadel of upper-class tradition, and an officer's career was more apt to be determined by his social than his military qualifications. Few Englishmen doubted, before 1899, that their army made up for its scantiness of numbers by being superior in quality to any other in the world, and the assertion "We've always won," in the most popular song of the day, was taken perfectly seriously. When the war broke out, much the same sort of language was heard about the Aldershot Army Corps as was subsequently to do duty for the Russian Steam Roller. The portraits of the commanders, with their bristling moustaches and rows of medals, were on everybody's mantelpiece. It was reported, with appropriate pride, that when one of the troopships, nearing Table Bay, had passed a home-bound liner, the first news eagerly inquired for was the result of the *Cesarewitch*. That was the sort of leader in whom England could put her whole trust—the man to whom the result of a race was of more moment than the development of a national crisis, and the course of the very war to which he himself was bound.

Never was there a more humiliating disillusionment than that which the South African War brought in its train. Except that by dint of wealth and numbers the Boer resistance was, at long last, overcome, there was little in which even the most infatuated Jingo

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could find food for pride. It would be hardly too much to say that the British army had become the laughing-stock of Europe. Its foreign critics were no doubt blind to the real difficulties of a task, which it is more than doubtful whether any Continental army could have accomplished without an even greater expenditure of time and man-power. But what actually came out during the war, and was confirmed by the findings of a Royal Commission, was disquieting enough. The upper class had been weighed in the balances and found wanting in the higher qualities of leadership. Mere physical courage was not enough. The British officer was an amateur, who took his duties only half seriously, and had proved lacking in brains and initiative. Of the country gentry who officered the volunteer units, even Lord Methuen, a guardsman, had been moved to suggest that the first thing to be done was "to come down with a good strong hand on those gentlemen with money and no brains."

South Africa had, even before the war, been known as the grave of military reputations. This notoriety it more than retained. Scarcely one of the higher commanders failed to return with more or less faded laurels. The two most conspicuous exceptions, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, had, significantly enough, escaped the ordinary social and regimental routine. The other commanders might well have been brought up in the old Roman belief that it is unworthy of a great people to win victories by anything but honest force applied in strict accordance with tradition. A Boer, who remembered Laing's Nek and Majuba, might have recalled Wellington's dictum, "They came on in the old way and were beaten in the old way," for Colenso was merely Laing's Nek on a larger scale, and Spion Kop a bigger and bloodier Majuba.

It was fortunate for England that she did produce one commander of comparative brilliance in the veteran Lord Roberts, though how far the brains of

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his strategy were supplied by Colonel Henderson, the biographer of Stonewall Jackson, is a disputable point. It was Lord Roberts who, for the first and only time on the British side during the war, applied what Captain Liddell Hart has called the principle of indirect approach, thereby capturing the whole army of the hitherto unconquerable Cronje. But when Roberts, having conquered the capitals and the railway lines, deluded himself into the belief that he had broken the Boer resistance, he left the long and wearisome task of ending the subsequent guerilla war to Kitchener. This new commander was a man of immense organizing power, who, as Mercutio would have put it, fought by the book of arithmetic, and sought to wear down the enemy by a process of straightforward attrition. He constructed long lines of blockhouses, connected by barbed wire, and then, by organizing columns like beaters at a shoot, endeavoured to drive the enemy up against them. Most of the burghers would find a way through either the wire or the cordon, leaving behind perhaps a few score of the less fit or stout-hearted as a "bag", and then the tedious process would begin all over again.

Meanwhile, everywhere beyond the range of the British rifles, the veldt belonged to the Boers, who not only held their own territory, but invaded the British province of Cape Colony, and set it in a blaze of rebellion. On two occasions the farmers enjoyed what for most of them must have been their first sight of the sea. Against Kitchener's plodding methods, were pitted the dazzling tactics of three great partisan leaders, Botha, de Wet, and Delarey, the fame of whose exploits rapidly became world-wide. Even in England a certain sportsmanlike admiration could not be withheld when it was reported that de Wet had once again slipped unharmed through a dozen or so of converging columns. When, in default of his cap-

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ture, some pompous dispatch would announce that he had been "routed," the humour of the situation was appreciated nowhere more keenly than in England. A proclamation, that nobody—least of all the Boers—dreamed of taking seriously, threatening permanent banishment against any patriot leader found in the field after a certain date, had merely the effect of exciting ridicule at home, and contempt abroad.

It was in March, 1902, after the war had dragged on well into its third year, that the Boers scored the most sensational of all their triumphs. Lord Methuen, one of the best known of the British commanders, started off in search of Delarey, at the head of a patchwork force composed largely of mounted detachments from newly raised South African units. This was attacked by the Boers in the open veldt. Superbly handled by their leaders, the burghers circled round the flanks and rear of the lumbering column, and finally charged home, firing from the saddle. The whole of the colonial horse bolted in panic, leaving their general, with a small nucleus of British regulars, to put up a gallant but hopeless defence. The chivalrous Delarey, having captured Lord Methuen as he lay wounded, declined to retain so valuable a hostage—and this at a time when the leaders of the Cape Dutch were being shot, when captured, for "treason"—but returned him to the British lines in order that he might obtain proper medical treatment.

The spectacular honours were certainly with the Boers. And if we turn to the prosaic details of organization, that fill so small a space in military chronicles, but are so vital to the success of campaigns, the record of the British army, until Kitchener infused some measure of efficiency, is one of tragic muddling and blundering. It was only when the findings of the Royal Commission were published that the full extent of this was realized. The unfortunate soldiers had been sent into action with rifles

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incorrectly sighted, swords less capable of injury than hunting crops, boots that made marching a torture, pouches that littered the veldt with cartridges, entrenching tools that might have come out of a seaside toyshop. The mounted arm being dominant, for probably the last time in history, the business of providing remounts became of especial importance, and this was not only mismanaged more grossly than any other department of the service, but there were scandals of corruption. As for the medical service, disease accounted for more victims than bullets, a striking contrast with the Great War, where the proportion was something like 1 to 10. Nearly half a century after Florence Nightingale had gone out to Scutari, the old Crimean inefficiency which she had scotched proved to be murderously alive.

If England sacrificed the lives of her own soldiers with such criminal prodigality, what could be expected when she was faced with the unprecedented task of sheltering and feeding the enemy civilians? Once the guerilla war was fairly launched, it became evident that every farm upon the veldt was a potential depot for roving commandos, and that burghers who went home under pretence of resuming their peaceful avocations could not, even if they would, avoid being pressed into the service by the first field cornet who came along. The war might have gone on for ever if the farms had been left standing and inhabited. Besides, once the men were withdrawn, it would have been unthinkable to have left the women and children isolated in the vast loneliness of the veldt at the mercy of their Kaffir servants. To gather these people into the shelter of concentration camps was a measure not only of prudence, but of common humanity.

But to improvise, on so vast a scale, camps in which this scattered population could live and thrive, proved utterly beyond the competence of the British authorities. The Boer women themselves had scarcely the

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foggiest idea of hygiene, and it was not long before disease was rife in the crowded camps, and the children began to die off at an appalling rate. When the statistics of mortality became known, opinion all over the world was profoundly shocked, and even in England there was widespread indignation. The leader of the Opposition was moved to ask when a war was not a war, and to reply "when it is conducted by methods of barbarism." Another prominent Liberal went so far as to talk about "hecatombs of slaughtered babes." The Government itself was genuinely anxious to put things right; the camps were gradually improved and the percentage of deaths approached more normal proportions. It is remarkable that after the war, the memory of the concentration camps engendered less bitterness between the two races than might reasonably have been expected. No doubt the Boers, in their unsentimental way, could distinguish the effects of honest fecklessness from those of deliberate inhumanity.

As month by month the war dragged on, whatever of the spectacular or heroic element it may have originally possessed was eliminated. Like most other wars, it degenerated into sheer and sordid boredom, punctuated by occasional bouts of killing. It ceased to be good copy in the press. Even de Wet's publicity value slumped after a time, though it had a momentary revival when he broke one of the many cordons arranged for his benefit by reviving Hannibal's expedient of stampeding cattle at the enemy lines. It was in vain that indignant satirists called attention to the greater prominence given in the press to racing and football contests than to the surprise of a detachment of yeomanry or the rushing of some isolated post. The journalists would have been only too delighted to stunt war news. But not all the resources of Fleet Street could get any other reaction than a yawn to the sort of stimulus that, two years ago, had set off

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their public mafficking and flag-waving in an ecstasy of vicarious patriotism.

Even Tommy himself, the "gentleman in khaki doing his country's work," was doing it with an absence of enthusiasm that ran counter to all traditional notions. For Tommy was after all only a workman fed up with his job. As Major-General Brabazon, one of the most successful commanders at the front, candidly informed the Royal Commission, "Our troops degenerated most terribly towards the finish, when they got sick of it. I do not think our troops fought too well, you know." Even the stimulus of hatred was lacking, the atrocity propaganda, the manufacture of which is now one of the prime functions of a nation in arms, had long ceased to carry conviction. Tommy and Piet had got to know each other, and there had grown up between them the sort of half-humorous comradeship that actuates the professionals of rival teams. Even being taken prisoner merely meant being turned loose on the veldt minus one's equipment or essential portions of one's clothing. At worst, some exceptionally rough specimen of the farmer breed might bestow a kick by way of viaticum, but even this experience was preferable to that of stopping a Mauser bullet in some unnamed skirmish.

Now that the first fever of patriotic ardour had subsided, not a few Englishmen were asking why the war had ever started. Looking back on it from the detached standpoint of our own day, it seems that, with a moderate amount of tact and diplomacy, matters could have been prevented from coming to a head till old Paul Kruger had paid the debt to nature, and the Liberal elements in the Boer nation had become sufficiently dominant for a satisfactory compromise to have been patched up about the Uitlander franchise. But even granting the patriotic assumption that every war must be a fight to a finish, the finish, in this case,

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being the forcible annexation of the two republics by an empire whose motto was "*libertas*" as well as "*imperium*," there seems to have been every chance of writing "Finis" in March, 1901. The most statesmanlike of all the Boer leaders, Louis Botha, had been approached by Lord Kitchener with a view to arranging the terms of a peace, and a conference was accordingly held at Middelburg. Kitchener presented the unusual phenomenon of a soldier who was also a peace-loving diplomatist. It was his tact in handling Major Marchand at Fashoda that, more than any other cause, had averted the catastrophe of an Anglo-French war. And now, more than any of the civilians, he realized the difficulties of the task that lay before him of subduing the Boer commandos. He was, accordingly, for letting off the Boers as lightly as possible, consistently with the main purpose of ending their resistance and bringing them formally under the sway of Edward VII. But he had a civilian colleague in the shape of Lord Milner, the High Commissioner at the Cape and the newly appointed Governor of the Transvaal. This very able man was representative of the imperialism of the nineties in its most uncompromising form. The cold and relentless logic with which he had pushed the Uitlander claims had rendered the appeal to the sword almost inevitable, and even now his only fear was lest England should leave off before the Boers were well and truly beaten. It was his influence that prevailed with the Home Government in stiffening up the draft terms that, after a friendly and reasonable discussion with Botha, Kitchener proposed to submit. In particular, the Boer demand for an amnesty to such of the Cape Dutch as had taken up arms was sternly rejected. It is difficult to see how Botha could honourably have abandoned these, his comrades in arms. At any rate, when the amended draft was presented, he came to what proved to be the correct conclusion that, however

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long the war might go on, the Boers would get no worse terms presented to them, and that they had therefore little to lose except their lives in prolonging the struggle and hoping for something—perhaps Continental intervention or a Liberal government in England—to turn up.

The Government would have been acting in its own interests had it grasped the olive branch while opportunity served. Every month that the war dragged on weakened its prestige and popularity. The victory on the strength of which it had gone to the country had been indefinitely postponed. And though there was no question of anything but a victorious peace, the long anticlimax of the guerilla war was debited against the ministers who had profited by encouraging false hopes. The more sick the country got of the war, the more eagerly it looked for scapegoats on whom to vent its annoyance, and as the soldier in the field is usually sacrosanct from public criticism, the politicians got even more than their due share of the blame. They were held up to merciless ridicule in the opposition press. One of the most talented cartoonists of the time, F. C. Gould, depicted the four most prominent ministers as singing in chorus,

“ We don’t want to fight,
But by jingo when we do,
We’re reckless and we’re misinformed,
We’re optimistic too !

We *can’t* make a war, and we *won’t* make a peace,
So we don’t know when the war is going to stop ! ”

Stop, however, it did eventually, by dint of exhaustion on both sides. By the summer of 1902 it had become evident that the wearing down of the Boer resistance could be only a question of time, though that time might yet be indefinitely prolonged. The drives were becoming steadily more effective, and the British commanders had begun to specialize in night

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attacks on the Boer laagers. The Boers had put up an heroic fight for their independence, but like the stolid realists they were, they had no sentimental desire to die in the last ditch for the sake of honour. Things being as they were, it was the common-sense course to strike the best bargain possible with a victor who, for his part, had had more than enough of fighting. There were irreconcilable spirits on both sides—the indomitable de Wet was as stout as ever for independence, and the stern and unbending Milner, to whom the very idea of peace by negotiation savoured of weakness, would rather have continued the process of attrition to the bitter end than have accepted anything short of complete surrender. But this time it was the counsels of the moderates, Kitchener and Botha, that prevailed, and a peace was presently patched up on lines closely resembling those which had been under discussion at Middelburg more than a year before.

The Boers were to take an oath of allegiance to King Edward—whatever precise significance this ceremony may have had for them—they were to be allowed rifles on registration, and for the first time, perhaps, on record, the victors undertook to pay an indemnity to the vanquished, in the shape of £3,000,000, to be devoted to rebuilding and restocking the farms. Representative institutions were promised, and though some temporary British-controlled administration was set up, it must have been fairly evident to the Boers—what Kitchener is believed to have suggested to them informally at the Peace Conference—that with the advent of their friends, the Liberals, to power, they would obtain as large a measure of freedom within the Empire as even they could desire.

And so, leaving their prison camps at St. Helena and their laagers on the veldt, the burghers trekked back to their farms, and once the normal routine of life was resumed, found that it went on under

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Edward VII much as it had done under Paul Kruger. In England, the news that the long-expected finish had at last come led to a faint recrudescence of the mafficking spirit. Crowds celebrated the coming of peace by bawling the popular song of the moment,

Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you,
Though it pains my heart to go !
Something tells me I must leave you
For the front to fight the foe !

while the pacific enthusiasm of the Cambridge undergraduates waxed so great that several hundred pounds' worth of damage was achieved.

Another popular song at the beginning of the war had attempted to define the issue in the words,

Is Boer or Briton going to rule ?
That's what we want to know.

The appeal to violence in default of reason had afforded no final answer to that question ; the century was not fifteen years old before the Boers themselves had shown how to round up their hitherto uncapturable de Wet, and not thirty before a Boer administration, intransigently nationalist, was in power over the whole of South Africa, under conditions amounting in everything but name to independence. Even so, it was by no means certain that this administration had the least real desire to cut the bond, thinner than gossamer, yet stronger than links of iron, that bound together the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Whatever the future might hold in store, it sufficed for the present that, somehow or other, the war had come to a conclusion that could be called victorious, just in time for the new King's coronation at Westminster. It was said that Edward VII had exerted all his influence to get the war out of the way before this was due to take place. If so, it showed that instinctive sense of the fitness of things which was the most conspicuous of his kingly qualifications. For

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to most Englishmen, the Coronation signified a grand forgetfulness of whatever was unpleasant or humiliating in the immediate past, just as at the Hebrew jubilee there had been a general wiping out of old debts, and a new blank page to start the creditor's account book. The business of avenging Majuba had been done long ago ; people had ceased to know or care what sort of a vote Mr. Beit and his Uitlanders might have to register ; the time had come for a chivalrous victor to shake hands, before the camera, with a gallant, but vanquished, foe.

And here were the three great Boer leaders come to England in the nick of time to play their part in the drama. They were, in fact, visiting Europe—and first of all England—for the characteristically prosaic purpose of securing whatever extra cash might be obtainable for their fellow-burghers, to whom the covenanted three millions seemed a wretchedly small dole for the purpose of getting things started again on the farms. As the liner conveying them turned, off Cowes, towards Southampton Water, they might have seen, to starboard, the warships already assembled for one of those great naval reviews that advertised from time to time the way in which Britannia continued to rule the waves, and provided free propaganda for foreign associations, like the German Navy League, whose object it was to get that supremacy challenged.

To this pageant the Boer leaders were to be invited—no doubt when these rough and simple men saw what sort of a power they had defied, they would confess, like the Queen of Sheba, that there was no more spirit in them. It is doubtful, as a matter of fact, whether they had had enough curiosity to bestow a glance in the direction of Spithead. When they appeared on deck at Southampton a strange spectacle greeted their eyes. A cheering and waving crowd had assembled to greet them for all the world as if they had been British generals or cricketers. They

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may well have been taken aback. All three had a few weeks ago been outlaws, banished for life for their crimes against the Empire. De Wet, who had given most trouble, had been proportionately vilified in the press, and accused of the basest atrocities. Whatever they may have thought, the three gave no sign, but retired promptly and impassively from view. The invitation to the review was politely declined, whereat the organs of extreme imperialism were less politely displeased.

CHAPTER V
SINS OF SOCIETY

So, five years after the Diamond Jubilee, the captains and the kings—or at least princes—began to assemble again in London; war-hardened sergeants got busy with the minutiae of ceremonial; warships were got up to look as pretty as paint could make them; stands were put up, illuminations prepared, and flags got out of store; nothing, in fact, remained but for the tumult and the shouting to burst out afresh—when all was suddenly hushed to silence, as if during some festal music, instead of the conductor's baton a skeleton hand had been upraised. The King, it was reported, was ill—the King might be dying. He must be borne, not to the throne, but to the operating table. The whole country, almost the whole Empire, drew a profound breath of relief when it became known that the operation had been successful, and it was soon gladdened by the intelligence that the captains and kings need not depart after all, until His Majesty, very pale and shaken, but impelled by that sense of kingly duty whose seeds his father had planted, had steeled himself to go through the long fatiguing ordeal of being crowned. The deferred coronation had done more to enthrone Edward VII in the hearts of his subjects than that which had been originally planned could ever have done. He was already popular to an even greater extent than could be accounted for by organized mass suggestion. Beyond all doubt, his was a personality to be felt and known, a personality of force enough to impress its stamp upon history.

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So there was to be an Edwardian Era after all, and now that that last inconvenient legacy of Victorianism, the Boer War, was out of the way, there was nothing to do but to enjoy it. For that enjoyment was to be its distinguishing note was generally agreed. Kings, even of so marked an individuality as Edward VII, are important, in the modern age, not for what they are, but for what they symbolize. And Edward VII was the supreme symbol, for his subjects, of the two things of which they felt themselves to stand most in need, enjoyment and security. Queen Victoria, with the almost divine honours that had been accorded her towards the close of her reign, had been felt as an overshadowing inhibition, an incarnate "Thou shalt not." It was not in vain that she had decided that, for her, time should stand still from the day of her husband's death, in 1861, and that as his room should be kept every morning as if he were still alive, so should the personnel and manners of the court be such as would have conformed to the rigid standards of his Coburger rectitude. The freedom of the *fin de siècle* was nothing to her, and if the barriers that had surrounded the charmed circle of London Society had collapsed like the walls of Jericho before a plutocratic horde in which the countrymen of Joshua were well represented, those that she set up round her court stood like the walls of Windsor, continually restored, and frowning with bastions of respectability over the flats below.

"Teddy", as he was affectionately nicknamed, only gained in popularity from his reputation as a man of pleasure. The Puritan sentiment that had sanctified the inhibitions of the sixties was now *démodé*. The Queen had been like an enormously respected grandmother, in whose presence everybody had got to be on their best behaviour. Her son was a jolly old uncle, whose house was Liberty Hall, and whose motto—within certain gentlemanly limits—

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"Fay ce que vous voudra." It mattered not at all that to those who knew the King intimately, he presented not infrequently a side of his character that was anything but easy-going. His descent from a line of German Princelings had made him a stickler, to the point of pedantry, for the niceties of etiquette and precedent—there was probably no greater expert in Europe on such mysteries as those of buttons and ribbons, stars and medals, and woe betide those who were found incorrect in his sight! Even among his greatest intimates he was quick to suspect and resent the least encroachment on his royal dignity, as when one elderly and gesticulating nobleman, being a little short-sighted, happened accidentally to touch him in the course of an animated conversation. And like most men of pleasure, who have never been under the necessity of denying themselves, he could not endure, in daily life, the least opposition to his will or sacrifice of his convenience. Those who entertained him knew that everything must, at all costs, be exactly as he wished it, that he must be perpetually kept amused and never waiting for a moment—that not far beneath the easy-going surface was a quick and explosive temper. If somebody—even the Kaiser—got on his nerves, not even the weightiest reasons of State could keep him from showing it.

So that side of him was, after all, of importance, but it was scarcely known to the Man in the Street, and consequently did not affect the symbolic value of Edward VII. In the press, which served the average man as an acceptable substitute for his five wits, Edward was the universal uncle, with his smile and his cigar, the jolly old gentleman whose *bonhomie* nothing could put out. The press, where royalty was concerned, was discreet, all but one or two frankly blackguardly organs of a sporting tendency, whose robust Toryism did not prevent them from making royal weddings the occasion for lecherous

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witticisms, and who had hinted at a side of the King's life that was a matter of common gossip. Teddy, it was whispered, had gone the pace in his time—was perhaps going it still. And if he did, asked the Man in the Street, what of it? Didn't it show that His Majesty—God bless him!—was human like all the rest of us? And wasn't it a sort of royal charter for the minor liberties of his subjects? If the choice were between a merry and a moral monarch, the twentieth century would not hesitate. Few previous centuries would, for that matter, have hesitated either.

But a licence for greater freedom was only half of what the nation demanded of its Sovereign. He must carry also a guarantee of security. It was that which the aged Victoria had conferred in so supreme a degree—in her time, at least, her subjects could apprehend no major catastrophe. But the new century was troubled with nerves. Its safety stood to such reason as it possessed, and yet it wanted some visible and concrete assurance that all was really as safe as it seemed. This Edward VII, to an even greater extent than the Duke of Devonshire, was able to inspire. His own innate confidence was so supremely unquestioning. Nobody—except perhaps those who knew him very intimately—could imagine him nervous, or even in two minds about anything. As Whistler might have said—only not of art but of life—this man *knew*. To this day, the legend of Edward VII's statesmanlike genius persists in default of evidence, and it is tribute at least to his personality that it should be so. That there could fail to be profundity beneath so flawless a surface was not to be believed. Who more convincingly than he could say "Yea" to the existing order of things? The Duke might do so with a drawl and a half-suppressed yawn, but the King with a twinkle in his eye and a smile of compelling infectiousness.

There was something about the beginning of King

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Edward's reign—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the time following on his coronation—suggestive of the Restoration. Victoria's reign had been one, if not exactly of the saints, at any rate of moral formalism. Whatever naughtiness there may have been stirring in the nineties was at least held in check by the Queen on the heights and such awful examples as those of Charlie Dilke and Oscar Wilde in the depths. Whoever refused to do open homage to the image of Baal-Grundy that the Queen had set up—or at any rate would not allow to be taken down—might be cast at any moment to the lions of respectability. The spirit of Victorianism had begun to depart as early as the seventies, but however the *fin de siècle* might chafe, so long as the Queen lived, the Albertine inhibitions lay upon the age as ponderously as Albert's bronze image upon its pedestal in Hyde Park.

Edward VII, like his merry predecessor, had come to make a clean sweep of this already superannuated order of things. With that *flair* for the symbolic that always distinguished him, he signalized his break with the past by converting his mother's beloved Osborne from a palace to a naval college, and satisfying a never-forgotten resentment against her faithful gillie, John Brown, by the summary removal, from its place at Balmoral, of his memorial statue. The invisible barriers that had fenced the court were taken down at the same time, and the plutocrats and smart ladies who had chased away dull care from Marlborough House now did what they could to lighten the gloom of Buckingham Palace. Money, the supplanter of birth, had at last with good King Edward come into its own; Cassels and Sassoons, Rothschilds and Lawsons, were such men as he delighted to honour. Now, at last, Dives was free to enjoy, to an extent scarcely equalled even in the days of imperial Rome, the good time that science and the social system

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ensured to those whose bank balances enabled them to levy the necessary toll on the labour of all who toiled for hire or salary from China to Peru. And this they sought with what was sometimes an agonizing zest, because of that small, troubling voice that had hardly, in these early years of the century, dared to formulate itself into a definite—"How long?"

Nothing as yet so definite, while the King smiled at Newmarket, while Mr. Balfour lolled on the Treasury Bench, and in the House of Lords the Duke slumbered peacefully. For the King, if he stood for the best time that money could buy, stood also for the social stability that made such a time possible. His innate sense of fitness taught him within what limits even licence must be confined. It might be safe, in the twentieth century, to chance the wrath of the Lord, but it would be highly dangerous to affront public opinion. Times were different from those of Charles II or the Prince Regent, and there was a necessary decorum to be preserved in face of a potentially all-powerful proletariat.

Thus Edward VII made up for any laxity of morals by an extreme strictness of decorum. It is said that when skirts first began to be tentatively shortened, the daughter of a famous Admiral went to one of the royal dinner-parties with her ankles just showing. The King—though with a twinkle in his eye to take off the sting of his remark, for Edward VII could never be really hard on a lovely girl—greeted her with:

"I'm afraid you have made some mistake—this is a dinner, *not* a tennis-party."

He was determined that in so far as his influence could secure it, even plutocratic society should present a decent front to the world. In the fastest house-parties, a veneer of propriety was essential. A hostess would tolerate no open flaunting of the Decalogue, though she might contrive a judicious

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conjunction of bedrooms. English society was still, largely thanks to the King, without a peer for outward and visible propriety.

Nevertheless, there were rumours, and more than rumours, of orgies in high life both shameless and widespread. The revelations of the divorce court, vomited up in salacious detail by the press, enabled the public to enjoy some much appreciated glimpses of what the veil of propriety concealed. There was one famous case, in which, after charges and counter-charges and endless muck-raking, both parties were sent unsatisfied, but still united, away. And there were others, equally spicy. An enterprising priest, Father Bernard Vaughan, leapt into sudden notoriety by a series of sermons denouncing the Sins of Society—Society thronged to his services and ravenously clamoured for more.

To describe these sins, in the utmost permissible detail, became a lucrative occupation for novelists. The most successful of these was Mrs. Elinor Glyn, whose *Visits of Elizabeth*, the first and by far the most brilliant of a series of her novels, all dealing with the extravagances of an aristo-plutocratic smart set, was published just before the Queen's death. Here the heroine, a debutante *ingénue*, is conducted through a round of house-parties, at the very first of which no less than two men—one of them the charming Marquis who is to make her his bride—casually attempt to seduce her. In King Edward's reign other novelists, without Mrs. Glyn's lightness of touch, stripped the decent drapery from a Society whose contempt of sexual taboos is described with a candour positively brutal.

It would be monstrous, on the strength of such evidence, to jump to the conclusion that Edwardian upper-class society was a hotbed of vice. The popular novelist, like the popular preacher, is out to create the biggest sensation possible, and the spicier

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the fare, the richer the reward. The journalist is catering for a public that demands its social intelligence dished up hot and strong. A record of humdrum respectability has no publicity value, and if there were no sins of Society it would be necessary, in these days of competition, to invent them. What fires of illicit passion were really alight beneath such vast clouds of inky smoke?

In the nature of the case, nothing like a precise answer is possible. But one highly important fact must be borne in mind. At the very time when Society had come to be talked and written about as never before, the word had parted with the definite meaning it had possessed in mid-Victorian times. Then Society had been a closed and limited circle, by no means easy to enter, but within whose bounds everybody was more or less acquainted with everybody else. It was a glorified club, a Society in the narrower sense, with its passwords and rigidly enforced conventions. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, Society had ceased to have any organic unity, and had become an umbrella word, covering all sorts of cliques that had no knowledge of or connection with each other, and, in fact, anybody with an estate in the country and a *pied-à-terre* in the West End, who could afford to entertain on a sufficiently generous scale. It covered also a drifting mob of parasites, who could not pull their weight financially, but who used their birth, their attractions, or their wits, to secure a constant series of invitations.

Society had, in fact, been put upon a business footing, and the royal recognition of plutocracy only helped carry the process to its logical conclusion. But this did not mean that birth had ceased to count, for birth itself had monetary potentialities, which its possessors did not hesitate to exploit. The most serious purpose of Society was to serve as a marriage

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market. The London season, from May to mid-July, was, like the mating-time of animals, one of feverish courtships in which the young of both sexes were brought into contact under circumstances best calculated to provoke the sexual urge. Every mother knew that the ballroom served but as a court of approach to that inner sanctuary, the bedroom. That the daughters of rich parvenus should barter their charms and cash for a name was as old as the Middle Ages, but it was American enterprise that rendered heiresses as marketable a commodity as canned meat. The noblest houses were able to console themselves for shrinking rent rolls by drawing on the millions of Old Man So-and-so, acquired in a cut-throat struggle for economic survival, incomprehensible, fortunately, to a bridegroom whose ancestors had done nothing more exciting than enclose the common lands of their peasantry or depopulate a few grouse moors. Nor were American millionaires the only begetters of marketable offspring. The traffic in heiresses, though the supply was naturally limited, was, like that in white slaves, cosmopolitan.

There were other and more arduous ways in which birth could be made to yield income. There were numerous services that needy aristocrats could perform—for a consideration. Daughters could be launched, introduced and, with luck, mated, in the course of a season, by some well-connected chaperon. Journalism offered a rich and continually expanding field of activity for those whose names carried conviction of their inner knowledge. It might even be possible to give the guarantee of a title to the honesty of some company, and trust to luck that your fellow-directors would go straight enough to keep your scutcheon untarnished. And it was possible, by encouraging moneyed friends, to be repaid in business tips worth a fortune. It would be difficult to compute what Edward VII owed to the friendship of Sir

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Ernest Cassel, but such a computation, if made, would be most suitably recorded on cash-ruled paper.

In a Society that really consisted of a number of little societies with no bond of union, and not much in common except the wherewithal to foot the bill, it was impossible to enforce any uniform code of ethics or manners. It was inevitable that there should be a fast or—to put it plainly—a promiscuous set. Money, to those without traditions, was made to be enjoyed. Why should they cramp their style with taboos? Few of them continued to fear the Lord of their grandparents, or indeed thought much about religion except as a *cachet* of gentility. The sentence of expulsion from Society, which, in Victorian times, had followed upon even innocent association with scandal, was robbed of its direst terrors when there was no longer any coherent Society to do the expelling or to be expelled from. A thoroughly fast clique might be relied upon to view with tolerance the lapses of its members, and those scions of ancient houses to whom association with Dives was a profitable investment could not afford themselves the luxury of a quarrel, on moral grounds, with their bread and butter. But there might be limits to tolerance even in these circles. With morals one might trifle with impunity and the connivance of one's set. But no set was openly vicious, and it was never safe to dispense with the whitewash on the sepulchre. It would, at any rate, ruin any chances one might have had of being received at court.

So that any priest or journalist who plied the rake sufficiently hard could always be sure of finding some muck within the confines of Belgravia. But to treat the whole area as if it were an Augean Stable was grotesque. The sins of Society were the sins of a few plutocrats and parasites who—for the very reason that they were exceptional—succeeded in attracting a disproportionate amount of the limelight. As that

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shrewd and bitter observer, T. W. H. Crosland, put it, "The smart set is composed almost wholly of the middlings who, having acquired wealth by grinding the faces of the poor, proceed to make themselves notorious by throwing it vulgarly out of the window." It is these people, Crosland says, who run the marriage market, who wallow in every sort of tinselled vice, and who sprawl before the titled and well born.¹ The really significant thing about them would appear to be that, instead of being frank and permanent outsiders, as they would have been in the previous generation, they were now able to insinuate themselves into whatever constituted Society, and to find titled and well-born people willing to encourage their grovelling and even to share their sty, provided it were sufficiently gilded.

Meanwhile, the change that was taking place in upper-class society as a whole was something much too unsensational for the purposes of Father Vaughan, Miss Corelli, and their like. There was a loosening of restrictions, but it was often so gradual as hardly to be perceived except by looking back over a period of years. So long as the grandparents, who had lived through the Victorian Age, continued to survive, they mostly succeeded in preserving, under their own immediate auspices, the continuity of their old way of life. Perhaps family prayers would be suspended on some temporary plea, and not resumed; perhaps some concession would be made about Sunday, or a minimum of feminine cigarette smoking tolerated under protest—but it was not usually till the next generation, that had been young and frivolous in the seventies, came into its inheritance, that any real breach with tradition was effected.

Right up to the Great War, the extreme left upper-class wing, as we may style it, of fast and vulgar plutocrats, was probably less numerous than the

¹ *The Wicked Life*, pp. 30-1.

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slowly dwindling remnant of the Victorian right that refused to move with the times, and certainly insignificant compared with the cautiously progressive but essentially conservative centre, that included at least nine-tenths of the squirearchy, and of those numerous but unadvertised families, who perhaps contrived, with a minimum of necessary outlay, to give a ball for one of their daughters, and get through the season on the resultant invitations.

But the transformation, or, as an old-fashioned Victorian would certainly have called it, the moral dry rot of Society, was none the less real for being a slower and subtler process than the sensationalists made out. If the old motto had been "*noblesse oblige*," the new was, by imperceptible stages, coming to be "money talks"—often in strangely thick or nasal accents. The moral basis of mid-Victorian Society had, in fact, been superimposed upon an economic basis, the assumption being that everybody within the pale had so much money that he was above working for it or bothering about it in any way. However unintelligent and Philistine the Victorian ideals may have been, Society had been free to concentrate upon them, to become a school of such manners and morals as it was capable of desiring. Now the economic bottom of that Society had been knocked out. The land had ceased to pay, and the balance of economic power had tilted in favour of those miscellaneous activities comprehended under the term of business. The landed gentry were fighting a losing battle, and so hard pressed were they that few of them could any longer afford to disregard the main chance. Thus Society had become more and more frankly commercialized. It no longer resembled a very exclusive club, but rather a vast cosmopolitan hotel, in which anyone, not too openly disreputable to be admitted by the management, could book a suite by paying the necessary fee.

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And owing to the tremendous competition for rooms, prices were being continually forced up. Now that money talked louder than anything else in Society, those possessed by social ambitions strove to acquire merit by making as ostentatious a display of it as possible. Entertainments were on a scale of unprecedented lavishness—a coming-out ball at one of the really fashionable hotels might be easily a four-figure affair; not only one, but a second supper had to be provided—kidneys and beer consumed by daylight. The bill for cut flowers alone was often fabulous—one has seen the sorry spectacle of walls literally hidden by myriads of decapitated roses, as if some new Robespierre had wiped out the whole aristocracy of Flora's realm. Naturally the vulgar minority contrived to go one better by spreading themselves out in carefully advertised freak entertainments. And dressmakers, with their subsidized allies the journalists, were not slow to meet and stimulate the demand for fashions affording the utmost scope for prodigality.

The commercialization of Society involved that organized publicity that is the necessary handmaid of modern commerce. Gone were the days when noblemen dug tunnels and built palisades to hide their august presences from the vulgar stare. The new rich set the pace—who would want to throw his money about without an audience? Social value was publicity value—even beauty craved advertisement. The oldest families came to adapt themselves to the new conditions; what had been an occasional and much frowned-upon practice in the eighties had become the established custom of the early nineteenth-hundreds, and the bare shoulders of titled debutantes, exposed for inspection on front pages formerly consecrated to the music-hall, excited nameless longings in the breasts of sweeps.

In such a Society, the old taboos gradually ceased

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to have any meaning. They died hard because the older generation could see no reason for scrapping the principles of a lifetime. But the new arrivals had no use for them, and where they lingered on, they were becoming more and more plainly moribund. The great Victorian taboo of the Lord's Day was not observed in up-to-date houses, or observed only in so far as it might be necessary to conciliate the prejudices of old Lady So-and-so. It was the same with the practice of church-going. It might, or might not, be advisable to put in an occasional appearance in the family pew, especially if you had bought up the estate of the village squire, pew, patronage, vault and all. But the performance was gone through, if at all, without enthusiasm, and at steadily increasing intervals as its freshness wore off. It would not be quite true to say that the upper class of the new generation had gone atheist. It certainly believed in something that for want of a better name might be called God. But God's status in Society resembled that of one of those titled deadheads who are elected to the chairmanship of a Board in order to give the concern some guarantee of stability. Nobody dreamed of crediting Him with any real voice in the management or troubled much about what He might be supposed to want.

It might have been imagined that the influx of people who had made fortunes by their wits would have done something to cure that beef-wittedness and obsession with sport that had earned for the Victorian upper class the name of Barbarians. As it turned out, there was never the least sign of such an intellectual quickening. It was partly due to the almost complete lack of interest shown by Edward VII in culture, or its devotees, that accounted for the absence of necessary stimulus. No sooner had Dives entered upon his earthly paradise, in the shape of a country estate, than he strove to conform in every

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way to his ideal of what country gentlemen had been, and ought to be. His sons, fresh from their public schools, were particularly anxious not to display to their friends any defect in breeding. They took care to get into the Blood Set at their university, and when they came home rode to hounds, shot, and otherwise disported themselves with lordly abandon. In town they flung themselves into the pursuit of what passed for pleasure, a form of activity in which feminine legs were more prized than masculine brains. Or if they did feel an urge to employ their wits, there was a never-failing safety valve at the bridge table, this diversion, like that of crossword puzzles after the War, being one of the few crazes that showed no tendency to work its own cure. The contempt of smart people for anything smacking of intellect passed even into language.

Janie, she *is* so brainy!

“brainy” being the tentative predecessor of the notorious “highbrow.”

A Society thus

Restless, unfixed in principles and place,

cannot engender the concentration needful for even the most meretricious sort of culture. The art of conversation languished—the dinner-party was a function more and more exclusively reserved for the elderly, and King Edward’s English tended to become a rough-and-ready conversational shorthand on the lips of his most expensively educated subjects. Though there were still famous hostesses, one might have searched in vain in fashionable London for anything fit to be called a *salon*. And in the nineteenth-hundreds, there was nothing corresponding to the Souls, to raise up successors, in due time, to the Balfours and Curzons, the Blunts and Wyndhams.

The flood of denunciation poured out on the sins

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of Society was, no doubt, journalese froth. Society, as a whole, was not specially sinful, though it may have included and tolerated cliques of practising sensualists. But perversions of the truth may sometimes have more importance than the truth itself. For it was not so much what Society actually was that mattered, as what the public at large thought it was. The more it came to lack unity or coherence, the more strenuously did the press exert itself to supply the deficiency by creating an image sufficiently attractive to its clients to secure a maximum of sales. A new type of publication was coming into vogue, to minister to a state of mind that would constitute a psychological conundrum for any investigator not sufficiently habituated to its existence to take it as a matter of course. It consisted mainly of the dullest commonplace of gossip—for a ferocious law of libel exercised a salutary check on anything with the least point—about moneyed or titled people, and photographs of these same people snapped in pursuit of the most conventional activities, walking about paddocks, or stumping home from shoots. One can only imagine that the reader, day-dreaming, perhaps, in the dentist's waiting-room—an infallible repository of such literature—was transported for one moment into paradise; the programme of Lady Angelica Galahad was surely being held out for his—or her—inspection, and the "Haw!" that was surely escaping from General Drumhead's open mouth was for his—or her—personal edification. Even the impending drill was, for that blissful moment, forgotten.

But though the licence of the press did not—as in the United States—extend to personalities, there was nothing to prevent generalized statements and suggestions about Society to a public that desired nothing better than to be shocked by the sins of its superiors. One ingenious form of satisfying this

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demand was by a series of questions or innuendoes about the Captain who was horsewhipped last week in the Park by the husband of the pretty actress, or the Countess who thinks more of her chauffeur than her car. I once asked the editor of one of these publications what proportion of such amiable hints had any basis in fact whatever.

"On an average," he answered, "I should say about ten per cent. But then," he added, "I reckon on our readers identifying at least fifty."

So that, thanks to the combined efforts of journalists, novelists, preachers, and casual gossip-mongers, an impression was created that passed almost unchallenged at the time, and will probably be confirmed, on the strength of endless contemporary references, by the history books of the future, that upper-class Society, in the early nineteen-hundreds, was a definite body of people, wallowing in gilded luxury, and sexually unrestrained to the pitch of chronic nymphomania.¹

This was all very well for the middle class of the suburbs, to whom the desire for these things was that of the moth for the star, the devotion to something afar from the sphere of their respectability. But what of the great wage-earning class, that was beginning to take stock of its place in the social system, and was becoming ever more conscious of the power, conferred on it by the vote, to remould that system in accordance with its heart's desire and the teachings of Karl Marx? No doubt it thoroughly enjoyed news about the upper ten—and the more intimate and spicy the better. But if Society was really as corrupt as all this, was it not a moral duty to relieve it of its ill-gotten and ill-spent wealth? What claim had these drones . . . ? But the line of thought is too obvious to call for detailed elaboration.

¹ Such, at least, seems the line destined to be taken in novels dealing with the Edwardians.

CHAPTER VI

SEEDS OF GERMANOPHOBIA

It was not so much a spirit of aggressiveness, as one of fear, that first drew England into the vortex of Continental politics. Those of her statesmen who were most inebriated with the power and pride of empire were the least confident of her ability to stand without allies. But even the loosest alliance involved taking sides with one of the two rival combinations that faced each other on the Continent, and were known as the Dual and the Triple Alliances.

How had this grouping come about? Its origin must be sought in the annexation by victorious Germany of two French provinces in 1871. The international situation was henceforth dominated and poisoned by the fact that France was inflexibly determined to take back her own, and to wipe out her humiliation at the first opportunity. As for Germany, she could never relax her armed vigilance for a moment. Bismarck, having been overborne into the one vital blunder of his career, bent all his genius to retrieving it by keeping France isolated. By a masterpiece of Machiavellian finesse, he formed a great, central European alliance with Austria and Italy, and managed to make assurance doubly sure by a secret pact with Russia.¹ It was only when the young Kaiser, William II, had disembarrassed himself of Bismarck, that the second step was taken on the road to ruin by Germany's refusal to renew her Russian reinsurance, thus driving the Autocrat of the

¹ One cannot help contrasting the blundering ineptitude of French post-War diplomacy in antagonizing Italy.

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North into the willing arms of Republican France, who at last obtained an ally of the first class and brought her *revanche* a stage nearer.

Such was the grouping of power at the opening of the century. From a purely Machiavellian standpoint, the situation might have been regarded as highly satisfactory to England. The balance of European power, always a main object of her policy, was made reasonably secure without any need for her weight to be thrown into either scale. The failure of European intervention to materialize at the time of the South African War was as much proof as could be required that she was safe from any combined action of the two groups. A policy of avoiding Continental entanglements had served her excellently since Waterloo, and never had there been a less obvious case for changing it.

But English policy no longer reflected the stolidity of squires, such as those who had formed the backbone of the resistance to Napoleon. The new phase of militant imperialism was one of overstrained nerves, and it was accounted one of the first duties of a patriot to live in a fever of perpetual apprehension. If the Franco-German-Russian menace had not materialized yesterday, it might do so to-morrow. A Russian attack on India was a bogey that had walked for a generation—and what was the little English army against those grey millions? Few among statesmen of the new school possessed the tough nerves of Lord Salisbury, who, in 1901, could write:

“It is impossible to judge whether the ‘isolation’ under which we are supposed to suffer, does or does not contain in it any elements of peril. It would hardly be wise to incur new and onerous obligations, in order to guard against *a danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing.*”¹

¹ *British Documents on the Origin of the War*, Vol. II, p. 68.

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But Lord Salisbury was at the end of his career, and the dynamic force in the government was that of Chamberlain's restless personality. And Chamberlain, whose mind ran naturally to grandiose schemes, was by no means satisfied with so tame a policy as that of Britain minding her own business, and leaving her neighbours to mind theirs. Friends she must have, and it was a choice between Dual Codlin and Triple Short. Before the affair of the Kruger telegram, and even down to the time of the South African War, that choice was easily made. The Teuton was sib to the Anglo-Saxon; Germany was England's natural, as well as her historical ally. Even the most portentous of academic Dryasdusts were not above writing up history in the interests of Teutonic propaganda—the delightful theory that the Anglo-Saxons had exterminated practically the entire Roman-British population being accepted as gospel on the strength of more footnotes than evidence. In most books about future wars, it was Germany who came to England's assistance against France and Russia. William le Queux, one of the most sensational journalists of the time, described such a conflict in *The Great War in England in 1897*, in which, after England has emerged triumphant from the customary invasion, the happy ending is brought about by the German cuirassiers clinking their spurs in the Boulevards, and Germany securing the vast Champagne territory as her share of the swag. The time was soon to come when in Mr. le Queux's prophetic vision ally and enemy would exchange rôles.

Feelers for an alliance had, for some years past, been put out by Germany, but it was only in 1898 that Chamberlain succeeded in overbearing his Chief's scruples sufficiently to allow of his proposing, with his usual undiplomatic bluntness, the embodiment of such a pact in a definite treaty. Here was Germany's chance of cancelling the effect of her blunder in

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alienating Russia, and of making her own position secure for as long as human prescience could foresee. Had her policy been one of perfectly enlightened egotism, had Bismarck been still at the helm, it is incredible that she could have let slip such an opportunity. But in real life, egotism is seldom enlightened—the Devil is an ass. Genius had ceased to inspire the calculations of Germany's rulers, and cunning, equally short-sighted and greedy, took its place. Instead of the rugged old Chancellor at the helm, there was now the polished von Bülow, first Foreign Secretary, and afterwards, in 1900, Chancellor, but the decisive voice in matters of high policy was that of the wire-puller and intriguer, Baron von Holstein, who, in the obscurity of his office at Berlin, was able to wield a more malign influence over the destinies of mankind than has been granted to most mortals. Such men were incapable of framing a policy on bold or generous lines. The first thing that occurred to them on getting the British offer was that here was an opportunity for driving a hard bargain. The second was that the motives of the other party must be precisely similar to their own, and therefore to be regarded with the utmost suspicion. It is not to be wondered at, under these circumstances, that no business was done.

When that offer was renewed, three years later, the relations between the two Powers had already taken a turn for the worse. The South African War had aroused the already latent Anglophobia of Germany to a fever of hatred. Not only was every British reverse greeted with an enthusiasm that could hardly have been greater had the burghers been Pomeranian grenadiers, but the vilest and filthiest lies were put into circulation about British methods of war. The "Tommy", realistically depicted in forage cap and kilt, with teeth like a horse, was supposed to be in the habit of taking cover behind Boer women, and

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of finding even less reputable uses for his victims. All this was only a normal product of the intensive nationalism of the time—just as bad things were said in France, and, as the sequel proved, could be forgotten the moment there appeared to be a balance of advantage in getting the right side of England.

But Germany had embarked on a line of conduct more calculated even than insult to strain her relations with England. Hitherto she had not been seriously feared as a possible enemy, because she had concentrated her attention on making her army the most formidable military machine in the world, but had left the sovereignty of the seas unchallenged. Lately, however, she had begun to manifest an unmistakable intention to blossom into a first-class naval power. This was largely due to a temperamental kink of her neurotic Emperor. By birth he was half an Englishman, and the English Navy had always made a peculiar appeal to his imagination. He was probably never more sincere than when, in his usual flowery style, he spoke of his pride in being allowed to wear the uniform of Nelson and St. Vincent. But in the neurotic temperament, admiration is an only, too frequent stimulus of envy, and this again of positive hatred. There was something very significant in the Kaiser's passionate though most undiplomatic determination to carry off the yachting honours from his uncle at Cowes. Anything to do with either England or the Navy had an extraordinary power of exciting him; grandiose phrases were struck like sparks from an anvil—Germany would grasp the trident, the Kaiser would be Admiral of the Atlantic, he would not rest till he had brought his navy to the height at which his army stood, and so on, language which might have given legitimate cause for alarm even if it had been realized that its sources were pathological.

But not even the bitterest Germanophobes of these

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days dreamed of taking the Kaiser anything but seriously. Those who attributed to him the most sinister motives admitted his brilliance, if not his genius, and credited him with the most far-sighted schemes of policy. Possibly, but hardly probably, if they could have seen the irresponsible ejaculations that the Kaiser—posing in the part of Frederick the Great—was in the habit of scrawling on the margins of State documents, they might have revised their opinion.

The Kaiser's naval complex afforded the opportunity for Admiral von Tirpitz, one of his only two chosen instruments—the other being the soldier, Count von Schlieffen—gifted with any spark of creative genius, to realize a life's ideal of creating a great German navy, though not, it would appear, necessarily for the purpose of wresting the trident from Britannia. The foundations of this policy were laid by the Navy Law of 1898, while German public opinion was still smarting from the effects of the pointed demonstration of British naval power, by way of reply to the Kruger telegram, two years before, and in 1900, after Britain had performed another priceless service for the German Navy League by the seizure on the High Seas of a German mail-boat suspected of carrying contraband, the programme of construction was doubled. As if with the special purpose of arousing alarm in England, the preamble of this new law was enlivened by a statement of Germany's intention to possess so strong a fleet as to imperil even the mightiest naval antagonist. The threat was as unmistakable as it was inept, and William, not to be denied the opportunity of dropping his own private brick, hastened to inform the world, at the launch of a battleship, that on the ocean and beyond it no great decision could now be taken without the German Kaiser. It is not thus that serious conspirators illuminate their dark designs.

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To anyone with eyes to see, it must have been obvious that Anglo-German relations were moving to a crisis. There must be a definite joining or parting of ways. It would have been more than human for a country whose very life depended on her command of the seas, to ignore a challenge to that command so openly proclaimed. If the wild words of the Kaiser, or the pompous boasting of the new Naval law, meant anything, they expressed a deliberate intention of making the German fleet as powerful as an army that was already, by general admission, the most powerful in the world. Those who knew the doctrine of Clausewitz, whose works constituted the German military Bible, knew that the force of armies and fleets was meant to be applied, with sudden and overwhelming ruthlessness, whenever the needs of policy might dictate. Bismarck had shown the way in 1866. And Germany was seething and frothing with a hatred of England, sedulously fomented, according to the custom of the time, by the press, whose worst ebullitions were reproduced in the English journals, and lost none of their sting by selection.

Had the stolid insularity of Little England still been the inspiration of her policy, it is possible that neither statesmen nor public would have got unduly excited about these things. England was quite used to having her supremacy challenged—there had been times during the last century when the French fleet, or that of France and Russia combined, had approached dangerously near to equality, a thing that the German fleet could not do for many years to come—and even ultimate equality seems to have been no part of Tirpitz's intention. As for "frantic boast and foolish word", there was always the motto of the Keith family: "They have said. What say they? Let them say". Let the Kaiser find relief from his neuroses, and German politicians season their measures with whatever eyewash pleased them best.

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But such an attitude, though good enough for old stagers like Lord Salisbury, was not likely to satisfy a public that, thanks largely to the perpetual stimulus applied by its organs of opinion, was becoming ever more excitable and prone to put the most sensational interpretation upon everything that was reported to it. It was the strength of Chamberlain that his genius was so perfectly in harmony with this new spirit of the times. It was essentially melodramatic; he could hardly make a speech without saying something sensational. Though he possessed an intellectual grasp far exceeding that of the Kaiser, he had the same capacity for blazing indiscretions and had already, late in 1899, blurted out his desire for a grand racial union of Britain with Germany and the United States, a suggestion that had been received with humiliating disfavour in both countries.

But as late as 1901, he still clung to his hope of an Anglo-German alliance, though under the clear understanding that if this failed to materialize, England would look for friends to Germany's rivals. Accordingly Lord Lansdowne, who had taken over Salisbury's post at the Foreign Office, made a last effort to persuade the German statesmen to come to terms. The project was less hopeless than it might have appeared, for despite the Anglophobia of the German public, the Kaiser was still, by fits and starts, playing the part of England's friend, and subsequently took credit to himself for having poured cold water on any suggestion of European intervention on behalf of the Boers. As for Bülow, he was quite ready to trim his sails to any breeze that might be blowing, and even Holstein had no special animus against England. But greed and short-sighted cunning were still the basis of their calculations. They ruled out absolutely the possibility that England could ever enter into partnership with either France or Russia—Holstein described Chamberlain's warning as "a

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thorough-paced swindle," and believed her to be in such desperate straits for an ally that she must sooner or later become the humble satellite of Germany on any terms that might be offered her. At his instance it was made clear to England that a simple defensive alliance with Germany would not do, she must join the Triple Alliance—a course that might easily have committed her to go to war for the integrity of the ramshackle Austrian Empire—and she must get this arrangement ratified by Parliament.

That was too much for any British Government to swallow, and Chamberlain, to whom all things were either black or white, decided that the time had come for England to scrap any project of a Teutonic alliance. He signalized his change of front in a highly characteristic manner. Speaking at Edinburgh in the ensuing autumn he dealt justly, if not judiciously, with the mud-slinging campaign that had been waged in the Continental, and particularly the German, press against the British Army. Hitting impartially all round, he reminded his assailants that the British Army had never approached the methods of frightfulness practised, at one time or another, by France, Germany and Russia. This *tu quoque* had the effect of arousing a tempest of fury in Germany, and Bülow took it upon himself to utter a public rebuke of Chamberlain before the Reichstag. It was not in Chamberlain's nature to take rebuke with patience, and at the first opportunity, a Silversmiths' dinner in Birmingham, he hit back with a shattering directness of phrase: "What I have said I have said. I withdraw nothing. I qualify nothing. I defend nothing. . . . I am responsible only to my own Sovereign and my own country." Of course the whole patriotic press of England was frantic in its applause, and talked of "the boastful Prussian rolling in the dust," but the only lasting effect of the outburst was to confirm and embitter the estrangement between the two Teutonic

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powers. It was a very human outburst of Chamberlain's, and ranks among the classics of invective, but the Colonial Secretary was old enough to have learnt how seldom it pays to score publicly off anyone capable of harming you in the future.

The wire, as Bismarck would have put it, was now cut, beyond hope of repair, between London and Berlin, and events had begun to move, with tragic inevitability, towards a catastrophe that loomed ever more visibly ahead, but which no one had the least idea how to avert. The statesmen could have put up an excellent case for themselves according to their lights. Even Holstein was pulling his wires for what he understood to be the benefit of his country—and though a pettifogging recluse, he was no fool. He had argued with excellent logic from his own premises—that England was drifting towards war with Russia, and that she could never hope to reconcile her differences with France—to the conclusion that if Germany was to stand sponsor for the British Empire, she must and could extract a more than equivalent price for her services. As for the Kaiser, no part would have suited his theatrical instincts better than that of Theseus, a protecting hero, with the proud Amazon, Britannia, clinging and submissive at his side. And Chamberlain, like that other great imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, was equally sincere in his desire to give the utmost extension to the doctrine of racial solidarity on which modern imperialism was founded, and of which striking expression had recently been given by the admission of Germans and Americans to the Oxford scholarships bequeathed in Rhodes's will.

But the statesmen were the product of their time and the vehicles of its spirit. It is doubtful whether they could conceivably have deflected the course of events. It is not every generation that can be relied upon to throw up a Bismarck, and not even a Bismarck can juggle forever so as to produce equilibrium

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between the conflicting hatreds and fears and greeds of millions. Even if Holstein and Bülow had been as far-sighted as they were blind, it is more than doubtful whether German public opinion, lashed up as it had been into maniacal hatred of England, would ever have stomached an *entente*, much less an alliance with her, and even in England, it is doubtful whether distrust and resentment had not gone too far for the press to have countenanced, or Parliament to have sanctioned, such an accommodation.

Now that Chamberlain's words had brought to the surface all the latent resentment that had, for some time past, been felt against Germany, the press devoted itself to the task of working up that resentment to a settled and apprehensive enmity. There is a cartoon by Mr. Max Beerbohm that brings out the spirit of those pre-War years more eloquently than words. A swaggering and ruthless German towers over a shivering *poilu*, while from his desk an enormously fat John Bull looks up with an expression of quaking disapproval. It was not only the yellow press that was responsible for the fomenting of mass-hatred. One of the earliest papers to apply itself to the task was the still responsible and dignified *Times* of the Walter regime, whose Berlin correspondent was peculiarly assiduous in making his countrymen acquainted with the most wounding and provocative things that were being said about them in the German press.

The two great war-lords of the English press, who led the campaign of mass suggestion against Germany, were Alfred Harmsworth of the *Daily Mail* group, and Leo Maxse of the *National Review*. It can hardly be alleged against Harmsworth that he was moved by any inveterate or deep-seated prejudice against Germany. Once he had decided to get his public worked up to a frenzy of patriotic hate, he could display the impartiality of the true journalist

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in selecting that portion of the human race that promised the most fruitful results. He had already done his damndest to provoke and embitter the South African War, and the wisdom of his policy was triumphantly vindicated by the enormous increase the first year of war brought to the *Daily Mail* circulation. He now aspired to fly at nobler game than a republic of farmers, the most obvious choice—and for publicity purposes the most obvious choice is usually the best—in 1899 was that of France. It was not in Harmsworth's nature, nor indeed in his interest, to do things by halves. France was publicly pilloried in his papers as John Bull's inveterate enemy. Dreadful was the vengeance that was shortly about to overtake her. She was going to be rolled in mud and blood. Her colonies were going to be taken away and presented to Germany and Italy. No sort of an *entente cordiale* could ever exist between England and a country whose character England had learnt to despise—whereas for the German character she had never had anything but respect.

It was only a few brief years later that this great patriot, now a Peer of the Realm, was moved to say in an interview, "Yes, we detest the Germans cordially, they make themselves odious to the whole of Europe. I will not allow my paper [it was *The Times* now] to publish anything which might in any way hurt the feelings of the French, but I would not like to print anything which might be agreeable to the Germans."¹ Such was the man who was probably more instrumental than any other in working up the hatred against Germany, and the panic fear of her designs, that, after the final breakdown of the negotiations for an alliance, was gradually heightened to the pitch of a national obsession.

Maxse, with his *National Review*, could not have reached more than an insignificant fraction of the

¹ Quoted in *England under Edward VII*, by J. A. Farrer.

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Harmsworth public, but he was read in the clubs by the people whose influence most counted, and his unwearied repetition of the same theme could not fail to exercise an effect out of all proportion to the size of his audience. He was one of those journalists who seem only able to relieve their pent-up feelings by the literary equivalent of foaming at the mouth. The volume and energy of his invective were phenomenal—no bargee could excel him in adjectival fertility. He, like Harmsworth, had first toyed with Gallophobia, but towards the end of 1901, after Chamberlain's passage of arms with Bülow, he began to devote himself to the monthly denigration of Germany in a fashion that might have moved the envy of a Cato, and seconded his own efforts with those of any contributor who could express himself with the necessary unrestraint. Thus the first number for the year 1902 opens with an editorial on the German Menace, followed by a *Plea for the Isolation of Germany*, by a certain C. P., in which the following advice is given :

“Combat . . . German Anglophobia by working all round for the isolation of Germany. Bring to her the perils of her detestable position between France watching for a *revanche* and Russia at the head of an irreconcilable Slavism.”

To anybody in his sober senses it ought to have been obvious that this was the way not to combat Anglophobia, but to encourage and exacerbate it, and to provide the German advocates of armaments and preventive wars with the very arguments they most needed.

It is not necessary to credit these men with any consciously diabolical motives. Even Harmsworth, in spite of his gross inconsistency and his skill in always adopting that form of patriotism that promised the biggest sales, seems to have been a perfectly sincere patriot according to his lights. Mr. Hearst's

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alleged maxim, "Get excited when the public is excited," was obviously meant to imply, "Pretend to get excited." But Harmsworth, like the true Englishman he was, was at once less clear-headed and less cynical. His excitement was perfectly genuine, and he no doubt felt exactly the same towards France in 1899 as he did about Germany at any time from 1901 onwards. As for Maxse, his fanaticism was transparently sincere. Without something to hate he would probably have been miserable, and if there had not been a peril of some kind it would have been necessary for his peace of mind to invent one.

That there was a German peril, as there had in time past been a French peril, a Russian peril, and even an American peril, was all the more reason for a wise and dignified restraint, worthy of a great people, in meeting it. What was certain to multiply the peril, and to ensure its culmination in war, was to react to it in a spirit of hysterical emotion, to use the language, now of defiance and swaggering insult, now of panic-stricken exaggeration—language certain to be repeated in Germany and to arouse a precisely similar reaction there. If no more than the two or three leading press lords had been capable of acting upon the text, "Charity suffereth long and is kind," if they had been able to profit by the example of Queen Victoria, in her tactful and gentle handling of her imperial grandson, there would have been no Anglo-German and probably no World War. But then there might have been a falling-off of sales.

CHAPTER VII

TORY DECLINE

It can be said of England that if she did not encourage the leadership of philosophers in the press, she at least achieved it in the less important sphere of politics. For when, shortly after the Coronation, Lord Salisbury, having worn himself out in the service of his country, laid down the burden of office and went quietly home to end his days, the new Premier turned out to be not, as many had expected, the pushful Chamberlain, but Lord Salisbury's nephew, Arthur Balfour, who had made his mark as a philosopher before he had been heard of as a politician, and who, in the far from distinguished roll of contemporary British metaphysicians, might have put in a not unplausible claim for the leading place. He was a philosopher of a rather peculiar kind, for he had achieved orthodoxy by a scepticism more thoroughgoing than that of the sceptics themselves. Doubt, in popular parlance, had come to be associated with the undermining of faith by scientific rationalism, but Balfour turned the tables by undermining doubt with deeper doubt. However incredible they might find the universe of the faithful, the Rationalists and Agnostics had conjured up a vision even more fantastic and incredible. A godless universe turned out to be such a bundle of contradictions, that it became a philosophic necessity to postulate a God. This creed of super-doubt triumphant over doubt was hardly of the kind calculated to warm the heart, or inspire the regeneration of a materialistic age.

But it was characteristic of Balfour. What seemed

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in him the pose of a languidly interested, but emotionally detached spectator was in fact not a pose at all. His lifelong love of games is significant of his attitude to life—he mastered the art of Parliamentary debate with even more success than he achieved over the technique of the links. He had originally attached himself to Lord Randolph Churchill's Fourth Party which had played the game with a rigour highly diverting to the bored young philosopher, who stretched his long limbs in silent delight at the spectacle of his three associates making whoopee by persecuting Bradlaugh and bringing down the grizzled hairs of poor old Sir Stafford Northcote with sorrow to the grave.

Only one man, at this stage of his career, dreamed of regarding Balfour in the light of a statesman. That shrewd and cynical judge of character, Lord Salisbury, perceived that his nephew's philosophic detachment was complete enough to render him independent of such distracting emotions as fear—any game he had to play would be played to the last hole or rally with cold concentration. Accordingly Balfour was appointed, in 1886, to the critical Irish Secretaryship, the post in which poor Lord Frederick Cavendish had but recently lost his life. There were not a few Irish patriots who desired nothing better than to rid their country, in similar fashion, of an even less congenial ruler. But Balfour had not come to conciliate or to display the slightest sympathy with Irish aspirations. The game was one of firmness, and Balfour played it with an absence of excitement that must have been especially galling to the Irish nature. So far as such a policy could be a success, he succeeded beyond hope or expectation. Ireland, if not subdued, was quiescent, and—most wonderful of all—the Chief Secretary returned without a scratch.

The art of newspaper caricature, which consists

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in creating for public men imaginary characters for popular visualization, nowhere more signally demonstrated its futility than in its presentment of Balfour as the amiable rather effeminate puppet of the masterful "Joe." Of the two, Balfour's was the stronger personality. Chamberlain may be likened to a trim and fast cutter with sails always, even when tacking, filled by the breath of popular applause, and Balfour to a steamship, that shapes her course in complete indifference to every wind, from Boreas to Zephyr. When his intellect, after a careful balancing of advantages, had convinced him of the expediency of a course, he would act without calculation of consequences. It was he who, at the blackest hour of the Boer War, was responsible for cutting through the bands of official red tape, and sending out Roberts, with Kitchener as his chief-of-staff, to retrieve the situation. He had an even higher form of courage, inconceivable to Chamberlain, that impelled him to balanced or temporizing action, when his intellect had rejected the striking or sensational course as unwarranted by circumstances.

Such a man would have been in his element as Chancellor to a philosophic despot of the eighteenth century. Voltaire would have delighted to correspond with him, great Frederick would have respected, great Catherine have lost her heart for him. But for the premiership of a twentieth-century democracy he was likely to find his temperament about as well fitted as a razor for the sharpening of pencils. His detachment from public opinion was not likely to conduce to his popularity. The fact that he seldom troubled to read the newspapers, and saw no necessity of paying court to their bosses, was bound, sooner or later, to get the accumulated forces of mass suggestion put into motion against him. Moreover, Providence, which had endowed him with such splendid intellectual gifts, had, by way of compensation, denied him that

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of imaginative sympathy. His leadership could never be an inspiration. It is the pillar of fire and not the pillar of cloud that the multitude follows with enthusiasm.

Even before Lord Salisbury had quitted the helm, the ebbing of vitality from the Unionist administration had been sufficiently evident to enable far-sighted observers, like Kitchener, to predict its downfall at the next election. The long anticlimax of the war had stripped off the last rags of its election-time prestige and destroyed any kudos of final victory. The demand for the reform of the War Office and the army had become insistent, and was only mocked by a grandiose attempt to create a number of army corps on the continental model. These imposing bodies only existed on paper, and the whole scheme was soon exposed as eyewash, that left untouched all the faults of training and staff-work that had exacted so terrible a toll in South Africa.

In 1902 the Unionists, with the end of the war in sight, bethought them of the necessity for some sort of a domestic policy. It is highly characteristic of Balfour that he should have chosen as the principal measure of the Session, and himself personally have sponsored, a Bill for the complete reorganization of the chaotic educational system. Not only had the local School Boards, provided by Forster's great Act of 1870, proved notoriously slack and inefficient, but such secondary education as there was lacked any sort of co-ordination with primary, and even the scanty funds that had been doled out for the purpose had lately been ruled illegal by the fiat of a departmental auditor.

Balfour produced a measure that forms almost as notable a landmark in educational progress as the original Act of 1870. The old Boards were swept away, the County and Borough Councils were made the responsible educational authorities for their areas,

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and an attempt was made to unify the whole system from its basis in the primary schools to its apex in university scholarships. This scheme followed roughly the lines sketched out by those redoubtable Socialists, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, on behalf of the Fabian Society, and apart from its immediate effect in stimulating educational enthusiasm, has stood the test of time as well as could be reasonably expected by those who believe that the object of an Education Act is to educate.

That, as it turned out, was the last aspect of it to appeal to the popular imagination. Ever since its dim beginnings, the cause of public education in England had been dogged by a curse of sectarian rivalry. Multitudes of children must have gone illiterate between the time of Brougham's failure in the thirties and Forster's success in the seventies, for no other reason than that earnest Christians could not agree what dogma to stuff down their throats. The controversy was dominated by the fact that many of the schools had been provided and endowed by the Churches of Rome and England, with the express object of ensuring that the children should be brought up according to their respective principles, and this was gall to the Nonconformists, who had been too poor, even if they had been willing, to endow schools of their own. Accordingly the educational field was the scene of a chronic and holy war between Church and Chapel, the one always trying to screw a little more out of the State in the way of grants and privileges, the other determined to vex and cripple its rival in any way that might present itself. Whenever any scheme of educational reform was mooted, that battle was at once noisily joined, and became the main, or sole, topic of interest.

On this occasion there was another stimulant to righteous zeal in the desire, long felt by the Opposition, for a battle cry to unite its scattered ranks. For

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hitherto, if the Government was conscious of having cut none too distinguished a figure since the election, it could at least congratulate itself with the reflection that the Opposition presented an even sorrier spectacle, divided as it was into two bitterly hostile camps of Imperialists and Gladstonians. The expression "war to the knife and fork" had been coined to designate the various dinners at which this or that section of the party, fortified by champagne, proved its own Liberalism to be the one authentic brand. But even these convivial amenities were a poor compensation for the fate of a party divided against itself. Where there is a will to join forces, an excuse can usually be found, and the Education Bill was quickly perceived to be a godsend. The alliance of the Chapel with Liberalism had its origins in Whig and even in Roundhead times, and Imperialist and Pro-Boer could easily sink their differences when it was reported that the Church was, as in the days of Archbishop Laud, devising a new and monstrous tyranny.

The precise nature of this tyranny may be hard for those unversed in such controversies to appreciate. Such money as the Nonconformist had hitherto had to contribute towards grants for the voluntary schools had been taken from him by the tax-collector, and had not been specially ear-marked for any particular purpose. But there was now a county or borough rate from which schools of all kinds benefited, and it was somewhat more obvious, when the rate-collector came round, where the money was destined to go. It was intolerable that a chapel-goer should have to fork out a brass farthing towards teaching Tommy his catechism, though it was right and proper that Catholics and Agnostics should be touched in order that "simple Bible teaching" might be imparted to Judith. Nor were the Nonconformists alone in their eagerness for a Christian Donnybrook. The extreme High Churchmen, or Anglo-Catholics as they were

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beginning to be called, were for doctoring the Bill in the interest of their own dogma, and they found a champion of passionate eloquence in a son of Lord Salisbury's, Lord Hugh Cecil. The controversy was enlivened by the old fear of Popery, which still lingered on, even in the twentieth century. It is not wonderful that under these circumstances the original purpose of the Bill, that of adapting a system of education to the requirements of a civilized nation, was practically forgotten.

When the Bill had been passed by abnormal majorities, owing to the support of the Catholic Irish, a new and ominous element was imported into political war, one that showed how far the spirit of the age had begun to infect even domestic controversy. The new holy war, if it had failed in its immediate purpose, had been a triumphant success from the standpoint of the Liberal Central Office. Not only had the party been united as it had not been since the fall of Rosebery, but the evidence of by-elections was at last affording proof that the tide had definitely turned in its favour. It only remained to keep the indignation against the Bill at a steady boiling-point. Parnell and his merry men had showed how the skin game could be played within the walls of Parliament, and how legislation could be held up, not by argument, but by organized obstruction, and this procedure had been too faithfully copied by the more ardent spirits of both English parties. But Parnell's other device, of setting the law, once passed, at defiance, had not hitherto been adopted by either. Now, however, a campaign of Passive Resistance, as it was called, was organized all over the country against the payment of any rates that could benefit voluntary schools. An eminently respectable army of martyrs was recruited from the chapel-goers, and officered by their ministers. After the threats and blandishments of the rate-collector had proved finally

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ineffective, the authorities would proceed to a well-advertised distraint, and in presence of an admiring crowd, perhaps even to the strains of the local band, the good man would part with his parlour clock, or a framed copy of the Black Brunswicker, which, with any luck, would be purchased back for him by sympathetic friends. An heroic minority—less than a hundred all told—actually achieved the brief distinction of imprisonment.

In Wales, where the County Councils were Liberal almost to a man, another method was tried. These authorities would defeat the law by the simple device of refusing to administer it. They would blackmail the voluntary schools by refusing them funds, unless they themselves would consent to resign such privileges as the law allowed them. Money was even refused for fuel to warm the children in the winter. And when the Government passed a Bill to put this form of chilly persuasion out of their power, a bitter cry was raised of coercion, and there was one of those scenes in the House by which business was being held up at increasingly frequent intervals. Conspicuous in staging this performance was a certain Mr. Lloyd George, hitherto chiefly known as one of the most uncompromising of the Pro-Boer group, and a fire-brand of the extreme Radical left wing.

Warfare of this kind had one feature about it that rendered it especially agreeable to the bosses on both sides. For Unionists and Liberals, however bitterly they might play the game between themselves, had a common interest in keeping it a game. Anyone who had the privilege of being admitted to the gallery of the House of Commons would have seen the benches to right and left of the Speaker thronged, or sprinkled, with prosperous-looking gentlemen, all attired in the same funereal uniform of respectability. In the lobbies no one, who did not know the members' names, could have told which were Ministerialists

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and which Opposition. Such men would be naturally inclined to preserve the order of things of which their garb was a symbol, and to let the sleeping dogs of social revolution lie. The rigour of the game might indeed compel them to coquette with subversive theories and seek support from dangerous allies, as some litigious landowner might pursue a claim by hiring roughs to break down a neighbour's fence. But even so, the necessity was not exactly welcome. In the game of Passive Resistance, no more serious issues were involved than in that of football, and all the gains could be entered without deduction to the credit of the Liberal Party. But it was a different matter when the contest was one between Capital and Labour. Here the Liberal Party could, for the nonce, count Labour as its ally, and reckon every breach in the capitalist stronghold as a gain for its own policy of democratic progress. But could it truthfully be described as a net gain? Perhaps it was not yet realized that the tweed coat of Keir Hardie, though no longer seen in the House, constituted a more formidable threat to official Liberalism than the frock-coat of Mr. Balfour. But the Liberal forces did not advance to the attack with quite the same enthusiasm when the red banner was unfurled against the boss, as when the cross of Ebenezer was borne aloft against the rate-collector.

During the last years of the Queen's reign, the class war, about which so much had been heard in the eighties, seemed to have died down again of its own accord; Parliament and the nation had had something more exciting to think about than social problems, and too much money was wanted for killing farmers abroad to leave any available for improving the lot of the workers at home. The Unionist Party, which had once made social reform its chosen province, allowed itself to be overtaken by a form of mental paralysis, and instead of profiting by Bis-

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marck's example, and making it the business of the State to maintain its soldiers of industry in comfort, security, and employment, sat still and did nothing, well contented, apparently, with the fact that Labour as a political force continued to be negligible, and that in the industrial field, Capital had proved capable not only of signally defeating strikes, but also of organizing and strengthening its position. The militant heart seemed to have gone out of the Labour movement.

If the employing class had been capable of using its advantage wisely and generously, the capitalist order of society might have been established, for an indefinite period, on a basis of popular consent. But so far from having the imagination to progress, it lacked even the prudence to leave alone. The fatal tendency of the age to play the skin game on every possible occasion was revealed only too plainly in the counter-offensive against the dispirited Unions, which was extended from the industrial to the judicial field, the tendency of the courts to whittle down the rights of Trades Unions in industrial disputes having been notorious before the culminating and fatal decision of the House of Lords, in 1901, that the Unions could be cast in damages for the unlawful acts of their members in the furtherance of industrial disputes. This, whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter may have been, had the effect of upsetting a settlement that had lasted for a generation. The Trades Unions found themselves threatened with bankruptcy, and as the full implications of this new judge-made law slowly penetrated the consciousness of the workers, consternation gave place to a resolve which might have been expressed in the time-honoured formula, "*Nolumus leges Angliæ mutari.*"

The first question that naturally arose was—what was Parliament going to do about it? A Conservative Government was in office, and the Conservatives

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had owed their first great triumph of modern times largely to the indignation of the workers against the anti-Union bias of Gladstonian legislation. Disraeli's Government, true to his policy of trusting the workers, had so amended the law so as to redress the balance and to secure the Unions in the enjoyment of privileges which they had retained, without question, till the last years of the century. Would the men who yearly covered their great leader's statue with primroses allow his memory to be dishonoured? Would the Conservatives refuse to conserve?

They did nothing whatever, and by that inaction allowed the laws of England to be altered. Such negligence was far more injurious to them than their action in putting the Church schools on the rates, for now the impression was general among the workers, that the Government was a class government, committed to a policy of naked reaction. It is true that the Liberals displayed by no means the same enthusiasm over the Trades Union as they did over the Nonconformist cause. They themselves were by no means decided on a plain reversal of the Lords' judgment, though they were willing enough to contrast the reactionary bias of the Tories with their own democratic progressiveness.

But the great social forces, as Gladstone would have put it, were moving onward in their might and majesty, with or without the help of the Liberal caucus. Labour, fighting for its own hand, had gained, without opposition, a seat at Clitheroe in the summer of 1902, and in the spring of the next year won a resounding victory, when a bluff East-Ender, called Will Crooks, contrary to all expectation, captured the Woolwich seat, with over 3,000 votes to spare. The writing on the wall was plain for all to read.

And yet, if the question had been put as one of abstract justice, it might have been difficult to show conclusive reason why a Trades Union, whose agents

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forcibly restrict the freedom of workmen to take what jobs they choose, should claim to be absolved of liability in the matter. Perhaps the honest answer would be, that in war the niceties of abstract justice must yield to the necessity of hacking through.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPERIALISM IN ECLIPSE

When, on Lord Salisbury's resignation of the Premiership, his nephew had been appointed, as if by right, to succeed him, Mr. Chamberlain had accepted the situation with quiet dignity. But it must have been with increasing disquiet that he watched the Government, whose policy he was powerless to control, manifestly drifting to disaster. It was not in his nature to contemplate, with the philosophic detachment of his leader, the ebbing tide of popular favour, in the faith that it would surely turn in due season. He was nothing if not a man of action—an old man in a hurry. The promise of his career still waited fulfilment—and the time was short.

When he had accepted the Colonial Office in 1895, he had aspired to live in history not only as a builder of empire, but as a pioneer of social reform. However far he may have gone towards realizing the wider ambition, he had fallen far short of making England a model nation as he had made Birmingham a model city. His old age pension scheme showed no prospect of materializing. The fact is that the exigencies of a forward policy had left him neither the time nor the money for such luxuries. His opponents did not fail to taunt him with his failure to do anything for the common people whose champion he had once aspired to be.

But the word "failure" was not in Chamberlain's vocabulary. If for a few short years the Empire had stood in the way of Social Reform, he would justify his faith by planning on so comprehensive a scale

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that the Empire would more than redress the balance, and become the means of financing Social Reform. Chamberlain was that not uncommon combination of business man and visionary, and it was the most natural thing in the world for him to put his vision of Empire on a business footing. And so, as Mr. Kipling put it, Joseph dreamed a dream and told it to his brethren.

But if we are to understand the dream we must first be clear about the reality.

An immense amount of vague and rather frothy sentiment had been worked up during the nineties about the communities of white men out of which the four great Dominions were beginning to take shape. To the city dweller at home they were endowed with all the virtues that Rousseau had postulated for his unspoilt children of nature. They were raw-boned, bluff, aggressively manly denizens of the wild, essentially simple-minded creatures, full of loyal devotion to their Sovereign and Mother Country. To that last of the great line of Victorian Romantics, Mr. Kipling, they were the true Sons of the Blood, differing from the "poor little street-bred people" at home in the fact that their blood was of a richer, stronger mixture.

This was hardly the light in which the colonials viewed themselves, or can have desired others to view them. Taken as a whole, there was little romance in their natures, and one thing that nearly all had in common was that intense concentration on the main chance which is to be expected in rapidly expanding communities. The pioneering phase was obviously transitional; towns were beginning to spring up with mushroom rapidity; manufactures were getting started behind a wall of protective tariffs. To take one very small indication: the Australian cricket teams of the twentieth century were recruited from a very different type from that of the huge, hairy

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"cornstalks" who had come over in the late seventies, and passed as typical colonials—they were now much more likely to be townsmen of spruce appearance and clean-cut profiles, who pursued the task of winning, or making a draw, with a remorseless concentration that had nothing in it of the care-free spirit of English sportsmanship. It was that same determination to make good at all costs that rendered the colonial so formidable a soldier, and so contemptuous of the parade-ground smartness that had been the pride of European armies. In an age of realism, he was the supreme realist.

Under these circumstances it was not to be expected that, for a long time to come, there should be anything in the Colonies corresponding to the distinctive cultures that had grown up among European peoples. These still half-formed nations had no background of tradition, and where everybody was feverishly making good, there could seldom be leisure for the enjoyment of beautiful things, or the urge to create them. The Dominions were indeed capable of fathering such individual artists of genius as Lutyens and Baker in architecture and MacKinnell in sculpture, but except in so far as Sir Herbert Baker formed his early style on the Dutch colonial model, these men were artists in the European tradition who happened to have been born overseas.

But the colonials—at least those of them whose descent was British—cherished a loyalty to the Throne and imperial connection that had already stood the test of war. Like most practical men, they were not without a streak of sentimentality, and the King, while no more likely to interfere with them than the Man in the Moon, supplied, in his symbolic capacity, just that element of glamour and dignity that colonial life lacked. Partnership with Britain made these traditionless communities feel themselves inheritors of her ancient culture, and—what was of more immediate

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importance—her cult of liberty. This cult had its roots in the English Common Law, with its emphasis on individual rights, and was the exact opposite of what Mr. Kipling meant by his Law of the Greater Breed, which was, in essence, that of imperial Rome. Inspired by such a spirit, the Colonies—or Dominions as they now preferred to be called—would never consent to be units of an Empire, in the true sense of the word, or tolerate the least suspicion of *imperium*, but they might easily consent to become partners in a free commonwealth of nations.

Whatever sentiment the Colonial might harbour in his breast, it would always be with the saving proviso that business was business. He might volunteer, in his thousands, for a war, but even Chamberlain had to admit that "if it came to another question, the question of the share they bore in the pecuniary burden the war involved—well, I think they might have done more."¹ From a financial point of view, the terms of imperial partnership worked out extremely favourably for the Dominions. They were sheltered from foreign aggression by the might of the British Navy, not to speak of the Army, and all but a very exiguous moiety of this ever-increasing burden was shouldered by the British taxpayer. In the Imperial Conference of 1902, Canada had flatly declined a contribution to the British Navy on the ground that she preferred to create one of her own, a pious intention that for many years to come failed to materialize into anything likely to be of the least practical assistance in time of war. One financial concession, however, the Dominions were prepared to make. The idea of imperial Free Trade had long vanished into air. The Dominions had accepted the new nationalist gospel, and were busy surrounding themselves with tariff walls to keep out the goods of all other nations, including England. But though they did not dream of opening

¹ Speech at Birmingham, 19th May, 1903.

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a gap in these walls for British goods to enter with the same freedom as their own goods entered the British ports, they were ready to make the wall against the Mother Country slightly lower than that against the Lesser Breeds. In other words, they were willing so far to honour their partnership in the Commonwealth as to grant a certain preference to British goods. But even here there was a difficulty, since this concession could not be reciprocal, owing to the fact that England being a Free Trade country, had nothing left to concede, and could only grant a *quid pro quo* for further favours by putting up tariffs against foreign countries.

Such was the situation when Chamberlain, late in 1902, went to South Africa for the purpose of preaching reconciliation between Dutch and British, and also in the not too hopeful task of rousing the big financial interests in the Transvaal to the necessity of making some contribution towards the cost of the war. He was probably not at all sorry to quit the field of English politics for what he himself described as the calm of the illimitable veldt. He had no heart in the education controversy, in which his sympathies, as a Unitarian, were not with the Church schools, and the inertia that had come over the Unionist Government must have chafed him sorely. Like so many men of vision, he found his plans everywhere frustrated by colleagues whose minds were incapable of adapting themselves to any new or startling schemes, and who were merely annoyed at any attempt to move them out of the old ruts. For an enthusiast, with a message to communicate, the sight of the Duke's half-closed eyes and hand raised to suppress a yawn, or even that of Mr. Balfour, languidly balancing pros and cons, must have been the reverse of exhilarating. Chamberlain was not the man to go down on a water-logged ship.

By the time he returned to England in the early

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spring of 1903, Joseph had dreamed his dream, and was prepared to devote the rest of his life to making it come true. He had for years past clung to the faith that the future, as he himself had put it, was for great empires, and not for little states. But nobody realized better than he that a British Empire—so far as the daughter nations were concerned—could be founded on nothing else but consent. To what sort of a going concern could the Dominions be induced to consent? The way of political federation had been ruled out at the Imperial Conferences, and that of a military and naval union was scarcely more hopeful. There remained the fiscal solution, not indeed on the lines of Free Trade within the Empire, but by a system of preferences. And as the only way in which England could enter this system was by raising tariffs against the foreigner, Chamberlain was boldly prepared to adopt it.

But here he was pitting his genius against something more formidable than an economic theory. He was violating a dogma that had been sacred almost beyond the reach of living memory. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was supposed to have ushered in the years of England's prosperity; she had grown fat under Free Trade—before that there had been the Hungry Forties and all kinds of vanished horrors. Even Disraeli, who had risen to fame by denouncing Sir Robert Peel's apostacy from the Protectionist cause, had been only too glad that under his own leadership Free Trade should be tacitly accepted by the Tory Party, and Lord Salisbury had been of the same mind. During the eighties, when the agricultural depression had become acute, there had been some talk of reviving Protection under the guise of Fair Trade, but this was never taken very seriously in responsible quarters. The fact that almost every other country in the world had committed itself to Protection, only increased the pride of the islanders in their superior wisdom. The

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theory, as stated by popular economists, was as simple as two and two makes four—import duties *must* be more than paid for out of the pocket of the consumer. And accordingly any tax that was put on, or modified for the purpose of benefiting industry in the slightest degree, was a bad tax, one that violated the Ark of the fiscal Covenant.

There was, however, something nobler about the Free Trade cult than mere economic dogma. To such men as Cobden, Bright, and Gladstone, Free Trade had been a means of binding the nations together in a network of common interests. The free exchange of products would make the prosperity of each the welfare of all, and provide a beneficent substitute for war. The mere prosaic consciousness that business was business would cause nation to speak peace unto nation, and capitalist civilization would have automatically achieved that for which Saviours and Churches had, for countless ages, striven in vain. Incidentally, it would have shown how to reconcile the service of God with that of Mammon.

Now Chamberlain, when he returned from his meditations on the veldt, had it in his mind to tax imports, not with the immediate object of protecting industry, but in order to draw closer the bonds of imperial union. Speaking some two months after his home-coming, he could still assure his audience, "I am perfectly certain that I am not a Protectionist." But how long would he be able to maintain that attitude of economic disinterestedness? Like most men of overmastering will, he was neither a detached nor a consistent thinker. Once he had rushed into the fray, he was ready to pick up any weapon that came to hand. If a tariff was good for his main purpose it had got to be good for all purposes. Thus the apostle of Empire soon rallied to his standard the hitherto scattered and dispirited forces of the Fair Traders, and before long had put himself at the head

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of a Protectionist crusade with Imperial Preference as a modification of his programme.

If Chamberlain had hoped to make converts of his colleagues in the Cabinet, he was destined to be rudely undeceived. He had counted with confidence on inducing them to make at least one small and tentative advance in the direction of Imperial Preference now that the time had come for easing the burden of war taxation. One of the emergency imposts that had been most strenuously denounced had been a trifling registration duty on imported corn. It would not have been easy to prove that any housewife had found herself worse off on account of this duty—but to orthodox Free Traders it was that supreme abomination, a bread tax, the thin end of the starvation wedge, and, as such, not to be judged by evidence but condemned on principle. Chamberlain's plan was not to remove the duty altogether, but only to the extent of giving a free entry to empire corn—a concession that could have done no appreciable harm to anybody, but would have had the utmost value as a gesture. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had succeeded Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, was a certain Mr. Ritchie, a gentleman of no very distinguished attainments, but a Free Trader of the most orthodox persuasion. Nothing would induce him to deviate by one hairsbreadth from that orthodoxy for any consideration whatever. The duty must be retained as a whole, or removed as a whole. And removed, in Chamberlain's despite, it accordingly was.

Chamberlain was the last man in the world to accept such a rebuff. At the first opportunity, he spoke his mind to his fellow-townsmen in such a way as to leave no doubt that, in the teeth of the Chancellor's scruples, he stood whole-heartedly for Imperial Preference, with its accompaniment of import duties. It was plain to all that Mr. Balfour's Cabinet was divided against itself on this fundamental issue. Mr. Balfour himself

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reacted to the situation in a highly characteristic manner. Mr. Ritchie's orthodoxy and Mr. Chamberlain's apostolic fervour meant nothing to him. The problem was not to be solved by facile generalizations, still less by the repetition of slogans—it was, in fact, one of a complexity calculated to baffle experts. Mr. Balfour had the courage to admit that his mind was not fully made up on the subject. But he noted down his reflections, at some length, in the form of a memorandum that he submitted to his Cabinet. He applied to Free Trade orthodoxy that acid of philosophic doubt that had served him in his examination of Rationalism. He endeavoured to show that in a world bristling with competitive tariffs, a policy of free imports might not be one of Free Trade at all, but might result in an actual—perhaps a disastrous—restriction of trade. If trade was to attain the maximum of freedom, the State must be free too—free, most of all, from the dead hand of Cobdenite dogma, and able to fight hostile tariffs by retaliating, or threatening to retaliate, with tariffs of its own. On this conclusion Mr. Balfour was content to rest for the moment, without more than hinting at his attitude towards Mr. Chamberlain's proposals. But a mind so acute must have realized what sort of an edifice this philosophic basis was capable of supporting. The State that is free to discriminate against its enemies must obviously enjoy an equal freedom in favour of its friends. It was, at any rate, a matter to be decided on its own merits, and with a complete freedom from prejudice. Further—in this pamphlet—Balfour was not prepared to go, but he made no concealment from his colleagues of his sympathetic attitude towards Chamberlain's proposals.

It was in September that the crash came. Mr. Ritchie and the Free Trade Secretary for India, Lord George Hamilton, resigned; and, to the astonishment of the whole country, Mr. Chamberlain resigned at

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the same time, in order that he might have complete freedom to convert his countrymen to whatever gospel of sacrifice or self-interest the spirit might move him to proclaim. It was only three weeks afterwards that the ponderous workings of the Duke's mind were sufficiently advanced to enable him to decide on his own resignation. It was an event whose seriousness it would have been hard to exaggerate, for the country harboured an almost mystical faith in His Grace's soundness of judgment. Now that the great Tory Marquis was dead and the great Whig Duke had departed, the ballast seemed to have gone out of the once all-powerful Unionist Government. It was in vain that Mr. Balfour appointed Chamberlain's son to the Exchequer, and that he took advantage of the vacancy in the India Office to remove his unsuccessful War Minister to another sphere of activity—the Government had neither life in itself nor prestige in the country.

Mr. Chamberlain, confident of his ability to communicate his own enthusiasm to his audiences, addressed a series of monster meetings in the chief centres of population. Vast crowds thronged to hear and applaud him—never had his eloquence been more compelling. But it soon became evident that he was battling against a dead-weight of prejudice that even he was powerless to remove. In the Industrial North, particularly in Lancashire, Free Trade was something more than a dogma; it was a fixed habit of mind, a thing long ago decided upon and not open to discussion. And in the aftermath of the South African War, the appeal to imperial sentiment fell upon dull ears. Even in the country districts, where the offer of Protection was like a rope thrown to a drowning man, the slump in Unionist popularity was not to be arrested. The by-elections told a tale that from being ominous became catastrophic. Mr. Chamberlain appeared to have staked his all on a losing cause.

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Only his own native city remained staunchly faithful to him.

The whole country was now agog with excited discussion on questions of economics that had hitherto been relegated to the decision of specialists. If Mr. Balfour stood alone in hesitating to come to a final conclusion, his case was almost unique. Everybody else, from the retired colonel in his club to the ploughman holding forth in the bar parlour, was either a Free Trader or a Tariff Reformer, and to each and all of them, the whole matter appeared perfectly simple and capable of being settled by a few obvious generalizations.

Cries of "Your food will cost you more" were countered by others of "Tariff Reform means food and the money to pay for it," or "Tariff Reform means work for all." The cheap press was naturally to the fore in exploiting the possibilities of the situation, and in imparting to its readers the happy consciousness that they could master all the ins and outs of tariff policy without the least necessity for either knowledge of the facts, or concentrated thought. Alfred Harmsworth flung himself, with his usual passionate enthusiasm, into the fray. At first he decided that Free Food was the horse for his money, and he christened the proposed corn duty the Stomach Tax. But like Napoleon, on whose example he modelled himself, he knew that a great leader may have to change his tactical objective in the midst of a battle, and he soon, accordingly, bent all his energies, and all the wisdom and candour of his hosts of trained journalists, to the task of proving that unless John Bull would make up his mind to tax his stomach, there would be no health in him. His most important competitor, Arthur Pearson, who was engaged in forming another big newspaper combine on the Harmsworth model, was from the first on the side of Chamberlain.

Every prominent politician in the country contributed his share to the debate, and it had at least

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this advantage, that the electors were invited to exercise their minds on questions of grave national importance that had hitherto been relegated to the obscurity of bluebooks or discussed in a jargon of their own by academic specialists. These specialists did indeed make a supreme attempt to assert the authority in these matters that had been cheerfully conceded to the "classic" economists in times when Political Economy had been a euphemism for middle-class propaganda. Fourteen of its most authoritative professors launched a sort of academic Bull, enunciating *ex-cathedra*, in seven dogmatic propositions, the principles of the purest Free Trade orthodoxy. Their manifesto proved the dampest of damp squibs. Other professors, equally authoritative, rose up to proclaim that the principles of economic science sanctioned exactly opposite conclusions. Journalists employed on the Protectionist side treated the Fourteen with jeering contempt—"Fourteen Fools" was one of the phrases coined for their benefit, and the only effect of their intervention was to show the discredit into which the alleged science of Political Economy had fallen since the days of Ricardo and Mill.

Meanwhile the closing of the Liberal ranks, that the Education controversy had begun, was cemented by the threat to Free Trade. All the Liberal Imperialists, including their leader, Lord Rosebery, hastened to repudiate and abjure the fiscal Imperialism of Mr. Chamberlain, the doughtiest of all that statesman's oratorical opponents being Mr. Gladstone's former Home Secretary, Asquith, who spoke to the Free Trade brief with the dry incisiveness that had earned him his reputation at the Bar.

The most difficult task of all was that of Mr. Balfour. Apostolic fervour was not in his composition and he had too much intellectual detachment to admit of his seeing things in the sharp, contrasted colours in which they must appear to an advocate. He followed in

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the wake of Mr. Chamberlain, but at a considerable distance, and always with a certain hesitancy. He had to keep his party as well as the Empire together, and he no doubt argued that the fortunes of the two were inseparable. Mr. Balfour knew how that party had been crippled for nearly thirty years by the defection of Peel and his Free Trade following, and it would have taken very little to have provoked a secession of some seventy Unionist Free Traders, that would have condemned it to the wilderness for at least a generation. He had a part to play that required even more strength of character than that of holding down a recalcitrant Ireland. He had to temporize, to hold an unswerving middle course between the extremists of both wings. He was the target of obloquy and ridicule from every quarter; he was pilloried as a shuffler, a weakling, a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. But he accomplished his purpose as perhaps no other leader could have done. When the Unionists suffered the overwhelming electoral defeat that everybody knew to be in store for them, they went into opposition as a united party, and it was with defeated but closed ranks that they faced the now enormous battalions of the enemy.

The country was now in a mood to put the most unfavourable construction on any action the Government might choose to take. Trades Unionists and Nonconformists were already up in arms against them, and the wrath of the so-called Temperance¹ supporters was aroused by a Licensing Bill, which recognized, for the first time, that a licence to sell drink was, in effect, a species of property, and that the landlord had an equitable claim to compensation in the event of its being taken away. But what caused the cup of Unionist unpopularity to overflow, was the introduction of Chinese Labour on the Rand.

¹ A palpable misnomer, for how can the virtue of Temperance be exercised by compulsion?

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The South African War had brought disappointment enough to the nation and discredit on its authors. But at least there had been some confidence of extracting profit from the victory. The mere fact that the Rand-lords were supposed to have engineered the quarrel for the sake of dividends shows that there was an expectation of overflowing wealth once the mines had got going under British auspices, and it was on such hopes that Milner had banked for a return of prosperity to the Transvaal under his governorship. Nothing of the sort happened. The industry continued in a state of woeful stagnation, owing, principally, to the impossibility—from various causes—of obtaining a sufficient supply of Kaffir labour.

What was to be done? To introduce white labour seemed an economic impossibility, even if the taboo on white men doing manual labour could have been successfully set aside. Milner and the Rand-lords were ready with a solution. If Kaffir labour, why not Chinese? The coolie was a cheap and reasonably efficient substitute, though it would be necessary, for obvious reasons, to keep him segregated during his sojourn on the Rand. It was only necessary to obtain the assent of the Colonial Office, at which Chamberlain's successor was a certain Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, a gentleman of great personal charm, whose principal claim to distinction was that he had once not only kept wicket for England, but had gone on, as a last resource, with lobs, and proved more successful than any bowler in the team. Mr. Lyttelton's honest soul was charmed by Milner's solution.

Accordingly, coolies were imported to the Rand, to the number, ultimately, of some hundred thousand, and were kept segregated exactly as the Kaffirs had been. The experiment, economically, was justified by results; the mines began to pay; the population of the Rand rapidly increased; skilled white labour found employment in the work of supervision; pros-

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perity once again began to smile upon the Transvaal. But the effect of the ordinance in England was to provide the pretext for just the sort of agitation that was needed to seal the fate of the Government. With the reaction against Imperialism at its height, it mattered little, and indeed was hardly noticed, that the agitation took two distinct and even contradictory forms.

One of these was based on prejudice against the Yellow Man. Chinamen, in popular legend, were associated with all manner of villainy, from cheating at cards to dark plots to overflow Westwards and exterminate very painfully the entire population of Europe. When it came out that one or two robberies on lonely farms had been committed by stray coolies, the impression was confirmed that the Government was actively forwarding what was known as the Yellow Peril, and that jobs that ought to have gone to honest whites were being assigned to these sinister beings. It was in pursuance of some such idea that Mr. Lyttelton himself was dressed up, by caricaturists, in Chinese robes, and his amiable features distorted to a slit-eyed leer.

But in an even more popular form of the agitation, the Chinaman figured, not as a peril, but as a victim—a pathetic creature sold, for greed of gain, into the most abject slavery. Every horror that imagination could devise was attributed to the compounds. Even pious Nonconformists did not hesitate to fit hymn tunes to some such words as

They stand, those gloomy compounds,
All resonant with moans,
The loathsome beri-beri,
The coffins and the groans ;
But dividends are rising,
Park Lane is now serene,
The mansions of the magnates
Are decked in glorious sheen !¹

¹ Quoted from memory.

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One particularly effective cartoon represented the ghosts of a couple of Tommies gazing at a procession of fettered Chinamen, and remarking that this was not what they had thought to give their lives for.

Of the success of the agitation there could be no doubt. Hatred and pity for Chinamen, mingled, perhaps, with incipient revolt against a capitalism that had begun to transfer units of labour with the same soulless ease as units of credit, captured the soul of the electorate. Poor Mr. Lyttelton, who had never before had an enemy in the world, became the most unpopular man in the country. The Government's cup was full to overflowing—it only remained for it to go to the constituencies and drink it to the dregs.

CHAPTER IX

ENTENTE CORDIALE

When the Wilhelmstrasse, inspired by Holstein, had turned a final cold shoulder on Chamberlain's overtures for an alliance, England had come to a parting of ways. Should she remain stolidly faithful to Salisbury's ideal of splendid isolation, or follow the line already indicated by Chamberlain, of seeking elsewhere the friendship that the proud Teuton had offered at the price of vassalage? There was little doubt what that choice would be. Even before he retired to let his last few sands run out at Hatfield, the tired old Marquis had ceased to be much more than a dignified figurehead—the driving force behind his Government's policy was imparted by his masterful colleague from Birmingham. And Chamberlain, still smarting from Bülow's calculated snub, was not minded to turn the other cheek. "This statesman," says a German historian, "disillusioned and thrice rejected by Germany, aimed move after move, blow after blow, against her."¹

This, we suspect, is putting it a little over-emphatically, for though the spirit of the policy was undoubtedly Chamberlain's, its execution was in the hands of Lord Lansdowne, the Foreign Secretary, backed as he was by a permanent staff of consummate ability. Nor had the country the nerves to have stood by the policy that had served it so well during the past century. The British elector did not feel as if he could sleep quietly in his bed unless he could think of a Continental army, like a big brother, ready

¹ *Germany's Road to Ruin* by Karl Nowak, p. 267.

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to take his part against the German bully. But he who takes counsel with his nerves will be impelled to avoid the perils that he knows and visualizes, by shutting his eyes to others that he realizes not yet.

A policy dictated by nerves will be one of pure egotism. Neurotic nations, like neurotic individuals, do not feel themselves strong enough to think of anything but the main chance; they have no ideals, but only interests. They are impelled to seek their own, as best they may, among other egotists equally unscrupulous. They may take to themselves allies—do not even the gangsters the same? But the worth of friendship is what can be got out of it—beyond that is only sentimentality and moonshine. You choose your friends, and your policy, as you do your investments, but with this important difference, that in the twentieth century, unlike the eighteenth, it is necessary to enlist the emotions of the mob on behalf of any scheme of policy, and though this can usually be done by the use of mass-suggestion, such emotions are not deconditioned so easily as those of M. Pavlov's much advertised dogs, and are, in fact, when sufficiently worked up, more apt to resemble those of mad dogs. Thus the nice calculation of advantages that was the essence of eighteenth-century diplomacy is no longer possible to the modern statesman.

The first move in England's new policy was, however, the result of expert calculation. A friend—as friendships are reckoned in modern statecraft—was found, not in Europe, but in the farthest East. The island kingdom of Japan, since she had had her doors blown open by shot and shell for the entrance of Western trade, had transformed herself, in an astonishingly short time, into a power on the Western model, mechanized and ruthlessly efficient. Not only had she put herself beyond any danger of being exploited, like her neighbour China, in the interests of the white capitalist, but she showed every disposition to take

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a leading part in the business of Chinese exploitation. No gang was ever more virtuously indignant at the poaching of its preserves, than were the European Powers who had already begun to stake out claims on the estate of John Chinaman. When Japan, having fallen on and soundly thrashed the unhappy Celestials, proceeded to appropriate their harbour of Port Arthur, on which Russia had counted for the warm-water terminus of her Siberian railway, the Tsar had persuaded the French and Germans to join him in preserving the integrity of China at the expense of these unlicensed intruders. He had shortly afterwards proceeded to appropriate Port Arthur according to plan, while Germany grabbed a harbour on the other side of the Yellow Sea, and England could only show her indignation by taking charge of the distinctly inferior naval base of Wei-hai-wei. Japan noted these proceedings, and bided her time for revenge with bland impassivity. Meanwhile she proceeded to exploit her victory as best she might, by taking up the Yellow Man's Burden in the quaint and Hermit Kingdom of Korea, one of her first essays in the new technique comprising the murder of the Queen.

Germany could wait—it was Russia's turn first, for that Power, taking over the ancient rôle of the Tartars, was rapidly closing in on China from the north, and not content with fastening on the rich province of Manchuria, was actually beginning to impinge upon Japan's own special preserve of Korea—and that not for any reason of high policy, but simply because certain adventurers at the Tsar's court had managed to get some timber concessions there. That these unbaptized islanders should dare offer battle to the biggest of all Christian Powers stood not within the prospect of civilized belief—but the Japanese had not studied Clausewitz for nothing. Careful preparation, followed by overwhelming violence at the selected

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point and moment, and perhaps reinforced by some timely bluff, might perhaps achieve the miracle. There was only one thing for it, and that was to key up armaments to a pitch of efficiency at which they could not possibly be sustained, and then to strike at once and strike home.

But this time the ring must be kept clear. There must be no revival of the three-Power combination—even two adversaries would be one too many. How if some European Power—how if another island Empire—could this time be induced to keep the ring for the Yellow Man? The presence of the Muscovite on the shores of the Yellow Sea was hardly less of an offence to England than to Japan. Japan, if she went to war, would be pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for England. And so long as Britannia ruled the waves, it was a fairly safe calculation that not even France would rush into a conflict she had declined at Fashoda, for the sake of Russia's *beaux yeux*.

So, after the usual hard bargaining between the parties, early in 1902 the deal was concluded. The Japanese ambassador must have smiled to himself as he drafted the first clause stating that both countries were actuated by the sole desire of maintaining the *status quo* and general peace in the Extreme East, and especially the independence and territorial integrity of China and Korea. The immediate effect of the treaty, as he well knew, was to make war with Russia a practicable policy; its ultimate effect was to pave the way for the enslavement of Korea, the appropriation of Port Arthur, and the taking over from China of as much of her Manchurian province as force and subtlety would permit. The treaty provided that if war broke out in, or about, the Far East, either party should keep the ring clear for the other, and go to war with any third Power that presumed to interfere.

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It was a piece of diplomacy on both sides that would have rejoiced the heart of Machiavelli. What would be the ultimate effect on civilization of unslipping the dogs of war in the Far East was a matter beyond the Machiavellian purview. Lord Salisbury, who was still Premier, though no longer Foreign Secretary, was by no means enthusiastic for a departure so contrary to all his instincts. But Lord Salisbury was an old man, preparing for a long journey, and he thought it best to allow his younger colleague a free hand. And the Kaiser, relieved no doubt that this first departure from England's policy of isolation should take an anti-Russian rather than an anti-German direction, professed himself highly delighted.

If the Tsar had been wise, he would have made peace with his adversary while he was still in the way with him. If Japan could have secured a free hand in her own particular Naboth's vineyard of Korea, she might—rather than have incurred the fearful risk of putting all to the touch—have been induced to wink at the Russian proceedings, at any rate in Northern Manchuria. But wisdom, in that nightmare court of St. Petersburg, was as far to seek as palm trees at the Pole. The Japanese advances were repulsed with contemptuous discourtesy, and so one night, in February, 1904, without even a declaration of war, Japanese torpedo craft dashed in among the Russian warships as they lay unsuspectingly at anchor, inflicting such injuries as to give Japan command of the sea, and the consequent initiative on land for the rest of a war in which the superstructure of Western civilization, erected by Peter the Great and his successors over the half of two continents, was shaken almost to collapse. Like the concession hunters on the Yalu, John Bull had been staking a great deal for the chestnuts the Yellow Man was pulling out of the fire for his benefit. How if the revived menace of the Tartar to the heart of Europe might be the

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not so long deferred payment for the humiliation of Tsardom in the Far East? And how if the exploiters of China should prove to have admitted to their company another Foreign Devil worse than themselves?

No such doubts troubled the complacency of Edwardian England. On all hands it was agreed that Lord Lansdowne had accomplished a brilliant stroke of diplomacy, whose wisdom was vindicated by the triumph of the Japanese arms. But before this had been accomplished, a still more important departure had been taken in British policy. The thing that Bülow and Holstein, in their short-sighted greed, had believed impossible had taken place. England and France had drawn together, and the ranging of the European forces for Armageddon had visibly begun.

The idea of any bond of sentiment uniting England and France—let alone England and Russia—might well have seemed fantastic. France had never quite forgiven England for not siding with her in 1870, and the English occupation of France's special preserve, Egypt, had been bitterly resented. In 1893, Lord Dufferin, then British ambassador at Paris, had written to the Premier, Lord Rosebery, "I am afraid that I can only describe the sentiments of French people of all classes towards us as that of unmitigated and bitter dislike. . . . Not a day passes that we are not taken to task for our sordid politics, our overbearing manners, our selfishness, our perfidy and our other inveterate bad qualities."¹

Things had certainly not tended to get better since. The cup of French hatred had been filled to overflowing at the time of Fashoda; England had boiled with indignation at the prolonged scandal of the Dreyfus case; then had come the Boer War, and the insults to the Queen, and the "mud and blood" threats of the Harmsworth press. The publics of

¹ *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, Vol. II, p. 287.

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the two countries had been, in fact, thoroughly conditioned to hatred, ridicule and contempt of one another. And now the task was to decondition these habitual reactions and to build up a sentiment of mutual self-esteem.

It was here that the value of Edward VII as a national asset was revealed. He had not the concentration necessary for mastering the intricacies of diplomacy, and the legend of his statesmanlike genius is hardly borne out by the few and colourless minutes he affixed to State documents. But he had an unsurpassed gift of making himself popular, and what was almost unique in an Englishman, he loved and understood the Parisians. On May Day, in 1903, the King paid a State visit to a frigid and hostile Paris. Within a few days he was as popular as if he had been Henri Quatre come back to earth—Paris had taken her lover to her heart. He had not done anything theatrical or out of the ordinary—the story of his having laid himself out to woo with compliments the singers at the opera appears to be a myth. He had just gone about with his smile, and a bonhomie that was, in the best sense, Rabelaisian. He came, was seen, and the miracle of miracles happened—Anglophobia was *démodé*.

The task of the statesmen, Lansdowne and Delcassé, the French Minister, was now easy. All the differences that had kept the two countries in imminent danger of war for so many years proved capable of final adjustment, though only after the determined haggling without which no Frenchman can ever conclude a bargain. Two great nations had at last condescended to pool their differences in a way that would have been obvious common sense to any average pair of business rivals in private life. It seemed too good to be true that the many-headed anarchs could find so easy a way of seeking peace and ensuing it.

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It *was* too good to be true. If it had been a mere question of peace and goodwill between neighbours, the two might have gone on wrangling till doomsday. But this was certainly not the only, or even the main idea at the back of Delcassé's mind, or that of Chamberlain, who, though no longer in the Cabinet, still continued to supply driving force to the policy of the Unionist Government. In the extraordinary state of mind that prevailed at the beginning of the century, it was hardly possible to think of an *entente* between two great Powers without at once asking against whom it was directed. And in this case the answer was obvious—a bargain *with* France must be a bargain *at* Germany, and even at this early stage it carried some obligation of honour to back France against Germany, since nobody in his sober senses could imagine that France would have conceded anything whatever for the mere sake of peace and goodwill.

Anybody looking at a coloured map would have guessed that France had a final trick yet to secure in the almost completed game of African grab. Thanks, largely, to the complaisance of Bismarck, who had calculated, rightly, on embroiling her with England and Italy, and wrongly, on diverting her ambitions from the two lost provinces, France had now acquired an enormous empire covering most of the north-west portion of the Continent. But in the extreme north-west corner there was still a native Power whose immunity from absorption was a crying anomaly. This was the so-called Empire of Morocco, and there was little enough about it to excite either sentiment or sympathy. The country was backward and squalid to the last degree, and the so-called Emperor was so little able to keep order that not even the outskirts of Tangier were free from the activities of brigands. It was a clear case for what was euphemistically known as peaceful penetration, that is to say for appropri-

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tion, civilization, and exploitation, by some European power. And why not France—thus neatly rounding off that North-West African Empire?

It was not quite so simple as all that. In the first place, there was Spain, on the opposite shore, who considered herself to have a right to at least an equal share in the pickings of civilization. Then there were the other Continental Powers, who naturally preferred an open door for their trade and capital. Lastly there was England, who had a special interest in keeping France away from the old pirate bases on the Atlantic seaboard, and most of all from the coast opposite Gibraltar. If there had to be a share-out, she would have preferred to put in a claim of her own to her ancient possession of Tangier and a strip of coast which, in conjunction with Gibraltar, would have enabled her to bottle up the Mediterranean against whoever she pleased. She was, in short, little more friendly to French penetration of Morocco, than France to the English occupation of Egypt. To the Emperor of Morocco, England was so obviously the friend and protector, that in 1901 a mission was dispatched and received in great state by Edward VII. It is humanly certain that if Chamberlain could have only struck his bargain with Bülow, England and Germany would have been found working hand in glove to veto French designs on Morocco.

The bargain of 1904, not all of which was revealed to the world, included a simple agreement for a free British hand in Egypt in return for a free French hand in Morocco, as sensible and unsentimental an arrangement as if Dick Turpin had covenanted with Claude Duval: "You take the high road and I'll take the low road," or, as Wilfred Scawen Blunt put it, "It is clear now that the two Governments understand it as a division of spoils, not quite complete but to be so in the near future."¹ But perhaps this was

¹ *Diaries*, p. 509.

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not quite all. The question might even arise of how far the honour of the high road, which was certainly not inferior to that of civilized Powers in the twentieth century, bound Dick to go to Claude's aid in case of his civilizing activities being interfered with by third parties.

There was no doubt what interpretation suited Germany's interests. By sheer ineptitude and short-sighted cunning she had brought within the realm of practical politics the contingency that she had most reason to dread. For now that England and France had come together, it was only one more step to bringing about a similar *rapprochement* between England and Russia. Chamberlain had, in fact, actually suggested to Delcassé that he should work for this end, and, "when I heard this," said Delcassé, "I felt my brain turning." The Triple Alliance—perhaps not even triple, for Italian loyalty was already on the wane—would then be faced by a Triple Entente, capable, if it could be brought into the field, of reversing the verdict of 1870.

But there were still winning cards in Germany's hand, had she known how to play them. Now that Russia was reeling under blow after blow from Japan, and now that England was holding back France from going to her ally's support, tension between England and Russia had become more acute than ever, and war might at any moment have broken out between them. With Russian resources strained almost to breaking-point, the Dual Alliance was practically out of action, and it was impossible that the grey legions could have afforded any substantial help to France.

It required less than Bismarckian intelligence to see that two clear alternatives presented themselves to Germany. She could have reverted to Bismarck's half-formed plan of 1875, and taken this golden opportunity for cutting the knot with the sword. Such was the solution favoured by that able and ruth-

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less Chief of her General Staff, von Schlieffen. To his calculating brain, it was a matter of mathematical certainty that the French Army—whose efficiency was known to be at no very high level—could be pulverized within a few weeks from mobilization. The English Army, still awaiting effective reorganization, and unprepared for co-operation with the French, could hardly have made any serious difference. On the principles of Clausewitz, the obvious and only course was to have seized any or no pretext for an instant and final settlement with France.

This, if the legend had been well founded of a ruthless determination on the part of Germany to select her own moment for falling on her neighbours and achieving world-mastery, would certainly have been done. But the Kaiser, Bülow and Holstein were not men of iron like Schlieffen. To stake everything on the tremendous gamble of war was contrary to their deepest instincts. The Kaiser's own idea of being a happy warrior was to collect all the cavalry on both sides at manœuvres, and then, on a horse that had been carefully practised over the ground, to head a spectacular charge, with thunder of hooves and hurrahs, cuirasses scintillating in the sunlight, and loyal regiments of infantry hastening to lay down their arms. His ministers were equally happy in carrying on from moment to moment with the game of diplomatic finesse which they lacked the wit to realize how woefully they had bungled.

If it was not to be war, then the obvious alternative was to prevent the agreement between Britain and France from developing into an alliance. The vital thing to avoid was an aggressive or threatening attitude that would drive them to seek each other's support. It was not likely that English policy would aim at further entanglement with that of the Dual Alliance, without definite provocation. Let the sun shine, and the traveller would need no cloak to pro-

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tect him.* But the German capacity for finding and doing the most inept possible thing was not exhausted. Bülow, if he was not prepared to fight, was not afraid to bluster. France should be reminded, in no uncertain terms, of her weakness. And Germany, which had an excellent case in Morocco, would make it clear that she was going to prosecute it, not by argument nor persuasion, but by *force majeure*.

Accordingly, on the 31st of March, 1905, there was enacted at the port of Tangier a scene to which a Gilbert or an Offenbach would have found it hard to do justice. The Emperor of Germany landed from his yacht to pay a call in state on his good brother of Morocco. It is only fair to William to acknowledge that even his not conspicuously balanced judgment would have preserved him from this exploit. But Bülow, among whose brightest ideas it was, was remorselessly determined not to let his master off. He got it announced in the press that the visit would take place—it would never do to back out now. Would it not be said—"Lo, Cæsar is afraid"? Poor Cæsar was indeed afraid, not without cause. As he subsequently complained to Bülow—"I landed because you wanted me to . . . mounted a strange horse in spite of the impediment that my crippled left arm caused to my riding, and the horse was within an inch of costing me my life"¹—in spite of its being named "Dove of Peace." Thus mounted, and with a German general foot-slogging valiantly on either hand, His Imperial Majesty set forth in the midst of a chattering excited mob of the Sultan's bodyguard who brandished loaded and bayoneted rifles all round him, through the narrow streets of the Moslem town, with their dust and smells and the delighted clamour with which so unique a circus could not fail to be greeted. At one point of the route a novel attraction was provided by the presence of a ragged band

¹ *Bülow Memoirs*, English Translation, Vol. II, p. 140.

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of Spanish anarchists, who, as the Kaiser's presence was believed to be distasteful to their own Alphonso, decided to greet him by throwing caps instead of bombs. The whole affair, including lunch at the German Embassy, a *feu de joie* that nearly brought about the dreaded cropper, and an audience with the Sultan's uncle—for the Sultan himself was nowhere to be seen—lasted for some two hours, but in the course of it the Kaiser had fired off a brief oration, the product not of his own brain but of Bülow's, proclaiming, in terms of studied defiance to France, his intention of championing the Sultan's independence. And then, declining a pressing invitation to witness a spectacle of dances and combats on horseback, the Supreme War Lord regained the safety of his yacht, only too glad to find himself still alive.¹ If nobody had laughed at this performance, there was an old man with a scythe who must have grinned.

Bülow had jeopardized his master's life, so he informed him on his return, in order to see whether France would mobilize. As she had declined to be drawn, he had followed up his imagined advantage with a display of blustering violence at Paris. The whole question of Morocco must be submitted to a European Conference. France would have been ready to concede Germany better terms by private bargain than she could have hoped to get out of any Conference, but her rival was adamant. Delcassé, who would have stood firm, even at the hazard of war, was forced to resign. France made a virtue of necessity, accepted the Conference, and bided her time. Germany had scored a point of less than no practical value to herself, and the real effect of her action was shown by visits of the English and French fleets to each other's ports, amid tempestuous popular enthusiasm. Fear of the jack-boot was imparting a militant complexion to the Entente.

¹ Nowak, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-9.

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The year 1905 was to see the Imperial comedian in another rôle. Fate, whose forbearance appeared to be inexhaustible, had afforded Germany one more chance of retrieving her position, and repairing that wire to St. Petersburg that had been so wantonly cut after Bismarck's dismissal. The Tsardom had been shaken to its foundations. The war in the Far East had gone according to plan—the Japanese plan. The Tsar had got little good from the French alliance, and was seething with indignation against England. This had been raised to boiling-point by an incident that had brought the two powers to the very brink of war.

In the autumn of 1904, the Russian Baltic Fleet, a scratch collection of vessels only formidable on paper, had, after many delays, at last got under way for the Far East. From the first, the prevailing state of mind among all ranks was one of nervous apprehension arising from a just sense of their own incompetence. Even in these peaceful waters, the terror of the Japanese was upon them. As the untrained look-outs peered anxiously over the night sea, phantom torpedo-boats rose on the crest of every wave. At last, when this neurotic armada, expecting every moment to be attacked, steamed into the midst of a fleet of English trawlers, peacefully fishing on the Dogger Bank, a new and unique battle honour was added to the records of the Russian Navy. Disdaining surrender, the warships started blazing away at the trawlers and each other, inflicting a number of casualties, though not on the Japanese, the range being one of several thousand miles. After some half an hour of this work, the Russian fleet succeeded in getting clean away, too thankful for its own safety to have any thought of giving assistance to the sinking trawler that testified to the efficiency of its gunnery.

When the news reached England, the whole coun-

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try was not unnaturally furious with indignation at what was regarded as a cowardly murder, and a cry went up for vengeance. For the moment it seemed as if an Anglo-Russian war, with all its immeasurable potentialities of disaster, was about to break out—Lord Charles Beresford, standing across the Russian path with the Channel Fleet, made no secret of his eagerness to send the whole lot to Davy Jones. But there were cooler heads at Whitehall, and the Tsar, who had no stomach for war with a new adversary, did the gentlemanly thing, promised such reparation as was in his power, and consented to the conduct of his officers being submitted to a Court of Arbitration, whereupon he was permitted to forward these unhappy victims of his orders to the certain doom that awaited them at the hands of Admiral Togo.

But though the Tsar had spoken smooth things, black hatred was in his heart. How indeed could the man who had cheerfully gone on with his coronation pageantry and junketings after some thousands of his subjects had been trampled to death under his eyes, be expected to sympathize with all this fuss about a few wretched fishermen? Quite obviously it was a supreme exhibition of British cant and enmity to Russia. No words were too bad for "the mangy enemy," as Nicholas was pleased to characterize his future allies.

Further troubles were in store for the Tsar. Not only was the war going from bad to worse, but the home front was collapsing. A crowd of impoverished working people came to seek redress of their grievances from their Little Father, who slipped off out of harm's way, and left the most brutal of his uncles to shoot down a thousand or so of them as they stood unarmed in front of his Palace. Then, one afternoon, as His Majesty was playing tennis, his game was interrupted for a moment by a telegram announcing

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the practical annihilation of the Baltic Fleet in the Straits of Tsushima. Port Arthur had already fallen, and in a final great battle the Russian army was forced to fall back in good order from the Manchurian capital. Their enemy, if the Russians had only known it, had shot his bolt. The clever Japanese wrestler had forced the bear to give ground, but he remained locked in the brute's embrace. The hitherto victorious army could not advance and dared not retreat—it could only have stuck fast in its trenches till exhaustion had done its work.

But could the Tsardom itself hold out so long? Even before the War the state of the country had beggared description; now it was degenerating into naked anarchy. Everywhere mansions were being burnt and their owners murdered; a Grand Duke was blown to pieces in the streets of Moscow; an appointment to a provincial governership was not far short of a sentence of death; and the confusion was worse confounded by massacres organized on behalf of Church and State by the Black Hundreds. A constitution was granted, which did not appear likely to work, but which still further weakened the prestige of the Tsardom. The time was ripe for the Japanese to play their last card, and by a show of sweeping concessions, bluff the Russians into concluding a peace giving them Port Arthur, the railway to Mukden, and a free hand to deal with the wretched Koreans, whose fate mattered to no one but themselves.

It was little short of a miracle that the crazy fabric of Tsardom did manage to hold together for a few more years. But the Tsar's necessity was the Kaiser's opportunity. Only after the War did the world know of the strange correspondence that had been intermittently carried on between these two mighty rulers. The Kaiser was fully confident of his power to twist his simple cousin round his thumb—reading some of the letters one is reminded of the overwhelming

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geniality of the gentleman in the train, who invites some unsuspecting stranger to spot the lady. It was when the peace negotiations were just about to begin that Willy—as he used to sign himself—suggested to Nicky how nice it would be if they could meet and talk things over. This was best done on board ship, as a visit to the Autocrat on land was likely to be enlivened by Nihilists. Accordingly the two royal yachts met at Bjorkoe, off the coast of Finland, and the Kaiser prepared to bring off the master-stroke of his reign. After the usual salutes, inspections, and so forth, he got the Tsar alone in his cabin, and presented him with a treaty, which he hastily drafted, providing for a defensive alliance between Germany and Russia. Nicholas, probably more for the sake of feeling he was doing something to assert himself than for any other cause, suggested that a couple of words should be inserted limiting the scope of the treaty to Europe; the Kaiser thought this an excellent idea. It would be “a jolly memento of our meeting,” he went on to suggest, if Nicky would just append his autograph there and then. The Tsar, nothing loath, took his pen, signed, and then fell into his cousin’s arms, blessing God and Willy in one breath. It is usual for such important documents to be signed by ministers, as well as sovereigns, but this was no bar, for the Kaiser had one in attendance who was ready to put his name obediently to anything that was set before him, and the Tsar, having no minister handy, called in an old deaf Admiral, who kissed the Kaiser’s hand, gasping out what an honour it was to sign a document of such importance.¹

Such was the episode of Bjorkoe, one of the turning-points in the world’s history. For in the hands of wise men this document, crude and underhand as it was, might have been turned into an instrument for the salvation of Europe. A pact of mutual

¹ Nowak, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-17.

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defence and non-aggression between Germany and Russia, added to the one between France and Germany, might, if France could have been induced to agree, have led to the inclusion of the Dual and Triple Alliances in one league of Continental Powers, which the British Empire, and perhaps ultimately the United States, might have been induced to join, thus laying the foundations of a world federation capable of guaranteeing peace.

It is hardly necessary to say that such thoughts were far from the minds of the monarchs whom so honest an arrangement would have saved from unutterable tragedy. The treaty was only another move in the interminable skin game that they had been taught to play, and call it statesmanship. The Kaiser returned home proud of having checkmated England by forming that very combination against her that he had claimed credit for frustrating during the South African War—for he had no doubt that France, confronted with the *fait accompli* of the treaty, would be compelled to come in. Bülow, immediately he heard what had been done, wired fulsome congratulations to his master and went off to consult his friend Holstein. That innocent last moment insertion of the words “in Europe”—could it be that the simple Nicky had outwitted his cousin after all? For as Herr Nowak writes of Bülow, “the thing that mattered to him was not the peace of Europe . . . if Germany was to be unable to ask Russia to make trouble for Britain in India the whole agreement was valueless.” And so, without warning, Bülow presented the Kaiser with his resignation. The effect on the amazed Emperor of seeing his dream castle thus tumbled in ruins was to produce a violent brain-storm.

“Wire to me,” he begged piteously, “the word ‘All right’ and I shall know you will stay! For the morning after your resignation has been received,

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would find your Emperor alive no longer. Think of my poor wife and children.”¹

There were other wives and children whose interests were at stake.

A similar process of disillusionment had meanwhile been going on in St. Petersburg. A combination of uncles and ministers was not long in indicating to the Tsar that he was in the position of a lady who, being affianced to one suitor, accepts a proposal from another. They knew enough of the world to realize that it was not only for the sake of peace that France had entered into the Dual Alliance. And to double-cross an ally in this way was one of the things that was not done—at least with impunity. Nicholas was fortunately in the habit of saying “Yes” to whatever he was told with sufficient insistence, and he made little more difficulty in abandoning the treaty than he had in signing it.

And so, with both parties beginning to hedge and raise their terms, the treaty was soon waste paper; Nicholas, his trust in Willy turned to resentful suspicion, began to look for friends elsewhere than in Germany, and another, perhaps the decisive step, had been taken on the road to Armageddon.

¹ *Bülow Memoirs*, Vol. II, pp. 140-1.

BOOK II

THE EDWARDIAN SPIRIT

CHAPTER I

BANKRUPT ORTHODOXY

The reaction against the Victorian Age, and all that it signified, gathered momentum with every passing year. It was not only that imperialist politics had gone out of fashion with the South African fiasco, but that the whole universe, as the Victorians had understood it, was undergoing transformation. It was as if the Atlas who held up the cosmos were discovered to be kneeling upon something more tenuous than air.

The Victorian Rationalists had contrived to substitute a very simple and common-sense universe for that of Genesis. There was Space that went on for ever, Time that had already gone on for ever and would do so again, providing an ample stage for the drama of cosmic evolution. The caste was conveniently simple—there was Matter, an eternally fixed quantity of which had always existed in the form of solid indivisible units called atoms; there was Energy, which had likewise always existed, and yet had somehow for ever and ever been dissipating itself into space, so that the universe was an even more wonderful piece of mechanism than Paley's watch, for though it had never ceased to run down and there was no one to wind it up, it somehow continued to go. And then there was Gravity, which functioned, Newton knew how, and God knew why—or might have

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known if He had existed. And finally, Evolution, which meant that once Matter and Energy had been turned loose into the universe, such a world as we see and such men as we are would sooner or later be bound to happen, Darwin having accounted for the not unimportant final transition from mud to Man, thereby bowing God out of a universe whose explanation seemed less difficult to swallow when you thought of what simple materials it was composed—especially if you were an Agnostic, and had faith that nobody could ever possibly know how they had got there.

This was usually what Victorian Rationalism amounted to, though not exactly how it was put—the Victorians were far too decent to express themselves thus crudely. It made it somehow less hard to be deprived of God, free will, and immortality, if you thought what a very solid and straightforward going concern the universe turned out to be.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Rationalism—to give it its most popular name—had come down into the market-place and entered into active competition with the older faiths, a competition in which it enjoyed the advantage of a more than Islamic simplicity. It had its own jargon; if you did not hold its tenets whole and undefiled, you were intellectually out of it, branded, in fact, as an Obscurantist. You could only be a Freethinker by renouncing your freedom to think in any but one way. And the mere repetition of the word Science had something of the effect of an incantation—faith in Science had come to replace the old faith in God. The recognized prophet of Science was at this time a German biologist called Haeckel, whose *Riddle of the Universe*, translated into English, and brought out in a sixpenny edition, stated the extreme Rationalist case in a form of monistic pantheism—the sum of all natural forces being God, life a function of carbon and mind of

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matter—and with a sweeping aggressiveness of generalization that made it ideal propaganda.

Science had, in fact, for purposes of popular controversy, come to mean much the same thing as biology. Evolution was the most used and abused catchword of the time, and it was almost always biological evolution that was on the *tapis*. It is a curious fact, of which explanations may differ, that while the masters of physical science quite frequently tend to be believers—Kelvin, for instance, Clerk Maxwell, Stokes, Stuart, and Tait—the science of life seems to have a precisely opposite effect on its devotees. There is an old proverb, *ubi medicus, ibi atheus*, or “once a doctor, an atheist”, which, though a gross exaggeration if applied to the workaday G.P., comes nearer the truth when for practising doctor we substitute biological specialist. It would seem that the contemplation of the starry universe conduces more readily to belief in a soul than attendance at post-mortems.

A formidable attack had developed against the citadel of established faith along another line. It seemed as if the whole historical foundation of orthodox Christianity were in process of being undermined. The situation must have appeared hopeless indeed, when among the assailants were some of the official defenders, beneficed ecclesiastics holding important offices. It was no longer a question of Bishop Colenso getting tied up by a Zulu in a controversy about Noah’s ark, but of the very rock on which the edifice of faith had hitherto reposed. St. Paul had explicitly assured his Corinthian converts that if Christ had not risen from the dead, both his preaching and their faith were in vain, but now there were ministers of religion—notably the great Biblical scholar Canon Cheyne—who thought nothing whatever of basing the whole resurrection story not upon fact, but upon folk-lore. This same Canon was editor

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of an *Encyclopædia Biblica*, that went further in its destructive criticism of Holy Writ than most avowed Rationalists would have dared. It mattered little that the good Canon had earned the reputation, among his fellow-scholars, of a philological crank, and had got into the habit of using the blessed word *Jerahmeel* as a master key to unlock all the mysteries of Old Testament study. The fact remained that whereas the mild and reverent speculations of clerical Essayists and Reviewers in the sixties had fluttered all the ecclesiastical dovescots in England, this twentieth-century Canon could proceed on his iconoclastic way, and hardly an eyebrow be raised.

It was not that the ordinary parson was particularly interested in either evolution or the Higher Criticism. He, poor man, slaving at what was usually a thankless and underpaid job, had other things to think about. Adam and Eve provided good enough material for an occasional sermon, and to inquire too closely into differences between Elohist and Jahvist texts would have been asking for even more trouble than the daily round was apt to provide. If he wanted controversy, the technique of his profession would surely provide. As for the rising tide of infidelity, he was no Canute to say—"Thus far shalt thou come, and no further."

But the tide continued to rise, so gradually that it always seemed to be standing still, until you noticed that first this familiar object and then that was no longer visible. And the ripples broke with petulant froth ever higher upon the sand. Anyone who wished to understand the spirit of the times could not have done better than to have visited Hyde Park, on a fine evening, about the middle of the nineteen-hundreds. There he would have seen anything up to a dozen mob orators, each holding forth from his separate rostrum. It is remarkable that the overwhelming majority of these men elected to hold forth not on

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social but on religious questions. The most popular platform of all would not infrequently be that of some militant anti-Christian. This was no doubt partly due to the fact that the infidel exercised the privilege of being the funny man, thus putting the reverend or merely reverent defender of the faith at an unfair disadvantage.

"I start from the assumption," some earnest young curate, fresh from Oxford, would say, "that the Emperor Nero died about thirty years before the spread of the Christian religion."

"Ho yus!" would interject his adversary, "shows his sense, that did," and a round of laughter would register this doctrinal score.

It was a strange form of debate, this in which the audience drifted indifferently from group to group, sampling Catholic and Calvinist, Agnostic and Humanitarian Deist, more intent on being amused than anything else, and yet the attacks made by these fantastic orators on religion merely exaggerated, to the point of caricature, what had already been said by the leaders of Free Thought. Evolution was proclaimed as an infallible gospel based on authority. Biblical criticism was concentrated almost invariably on the Pentateuch, not without broad witticisms about "old Lot" and "old Nor". There was an occasional tendency to associate Free Thought with the propaganda of class hatred—it was thought no inconsistency to fling at some gowned and cadaverous ascetic the taunt that the priest was the fat man, *par excellence*. Occasionally some God-defying zealot would land himself in jail; for the law against blasphemy was so interpreted as only to be enforced against those who had not had the education to be godless within the bounds of good taste. There was one celebrated individual, plying, if I remember right, the incongruous craft of tailor's cutter, who emerged from more than one temporary retirement

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with a martyr's determination to make up for arrears.

It may seem a far cry from such crude evangelists to the intensely earnest and respectable men who stood at the head of the Rationalist movement, but every doctrine has to go through such process of vulgarization before it can be received by the mob. And if, by the time that Victorian Rationalism had percolated down to the lowest strata, it was already passing out of date on the heights of culture, such stalwarts as Edward Clodd and Mr. Joseph McCabe had built their tabernacles on the rock of nineteenth-century biology, and until they were gathered to Haeckel's bosom, they at least could be relied upon to stand fast in that faith.

Few of the younger generation affected the combative attitude towards Christianity that had been fashionable when Huxley had stood forth like Ajax, defying the thunders of Hawarden and Sinai, or when there had been talk of prosecuting the leading evolutionists. To hostility had succeeded a patronage that was more deadly by far. You did not trouble to disprove religion, you sympathetically—even affectionately—explained it away. While clergymen were defying the law and each other in the endeavour to adopt or prevent the practice of “reserving” the consecrated elements in some side chapel, where they could be adored, out of service hours, by a few earnest old maids and others whose emotions were that way inclined, such profound scholars as Sir James Frazer were beginning to class the Eucharist as one of many variants of the time-honoured practice of eating the God. The awful mysteries of the faith one by one came to be regarded as mysterious no longer, but rather as entirely human developments, not without their human beauty and pathos.

It was becoming no longer a question, as it had been in Victorian times, of “If the Lord be God,

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serve him; and if Science, serve her." You might comfortably contrive to serve both. The Lord might be admittedly an up-to-date version of Yahweh, the Storm-god of Sinai, but that was no reason for attacking, or even leaving, the Church. Sir James Frazer might explain away a Sacrament—that was his business—it did not in the least affect the legality of reserving it. If one might take a slight liberty with Mr. Belloc's lines one might thus summarize the most popular attitude in the new century to religious controversy :

And is it true? It is not true!
But even so it's got to do,
For people such as me and you.

This was, at any rate, the attitude enjoined by the most fashionable philosophy of the time, which, born in America, became domiciled in the Common Rooms of Oxford. It was called Pragmatism, and it was based on the denial of any such thing as absolute truth. A thing was true, not because it was, but because it worked—giving a new point to the Irishman's phrase, "True for you." You might accept the Lord or the Sacrament pragmatically, without bothering what they were, or were not, historically. To a genuine Victorian, whether he were Christian or Rationalist, such a standpoint would have been unintelligible. Either there was or there wasn't a God; the Resurrection was fact or fiction—you couldn't have it both ways. Whereas now, when you said "I believe", all that it might really amount to was that you were exploiting the advantages of making believe.

"Do we believe?" was, in fact, so burning a question, that it formed the subject of the greatest newspaper controversy of modern times, that ran, for the last quarter of 1904, in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*. It was calculated that if all the letters and sermons had been printed, they would have filled

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no less than 2,500 columns of the newspaper. The general impression to be derived from the printed Babel was that faith was becoming rather the exception than the rule among laymen who thought for themselves, and a notorious decline in the habit of church-going, especially among men, together with the increasing difficulty in finding candidates for ordination, told the same tale of belief on the wane. It would hardly have been too much to say that Christianity was rapidly ceasing to exercise any serious influence on the national life, except in so far as it provided a means of emotional solace for individuals.

This did not prevent numerous attempts, of a more or less sensational nature, from being made to whip up the old evangelical fervour. In Wales, a young enthusiast, called Evan Roberts, who believed that he had been able, night after night, to speak face to face with the Deity for hours on end, accepted a commission from this source to evangelize his fellow-countrymen. Mr. Roberts had even more remarkable and agitating experiences—"When I go out in the garden," he confided, "I see the devil grinning at me, but I am not afraid of him . . ." and with such a tale to tell it is no wonder that he was able to excite his hearers to transports of emotional enthusiasm by no means unfamiliar in that land of revivals, and hardly to be surpassed even in the plantations of the South. But it is more than doubtful whether the least permanent effect is produced by such crude doses of spiritual excitement.

In the following year, 1905, a couple of American Revivalists, called Torrey and Alexander, made a startling effort to repeat the success of Sankey and Moody. But the tenderness of the earlier evangelists, and the haunting appeal of such hymns as "Tell me the old, old story," were not things to be reproduced to order. Dr. Torrey was a hard and intolerant Fundamentalist, who believed in the literal inspiration of every word

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of Scripture and in the hottest and most literal of eternal torture-houses. Those who ventured to differ from him on these points were branded not only as infidels, but as living in sin. Sin, to Dr. Torrey, was a pretty comprehensive term. "Would you," he thundered, "like to have Christ find you in the theatre? Would you like to have Christ find you in the ballroom? Would you like Christ to find you at the card table?" An answer in the negative was obviously expected by Dr. Torrey. But the Revival had all the momentary success of a well-boosted stunt. Great audiences roared themselves hoarse to the altruistic strains of:

There will be glory, glory for me!

while three converted young men in Halifax were announced to have formed themselves into a committee to pray for seven ministers who had protested against the Evangelists' proceedings. But, as is the way of stunts, the excitement died down as rapidly as it had arisen. Fundamentalism was not destined to strike root on English soil.

At the other extreme the High Church, now coming to be known as Anglo-Catholic, and approximating more and more closely to the Roman practice, continued to gain ground within the Anglican fold. This movement had suffered a sharp setback in the nineties by the failure of what had seemed a promising attempt to get back into the Roman communion on a federal basis. That charming old scion of the Roman aristocracy, Pope Leo XIII, had been benevolently disposed towards the idea of recognizing the validity of Anglican Orders—not so his representative in England, Cardinal Vaughan, who was scandalized at the suggestion, and, in the urbane style proper to theological controversy, characterized Anglicans who aped the practices of Catholicism as marionettes of Satan. To these marionettes the road to Rome was accord-

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ingly barred once for all by Papal decree, and he must be sanguine indeed who imagines that the Holy See will extend its recognition to a hyphenated Catholicism.

This repulse by no means damped the ardour of the Anglo-Catholics, who, if they could not be Roman, could at least Romanize to their hearts' content within the elastic bonds of Anglican discipline. Archbishop Tait's Act for the restraining of these practices had proved an absolute failure, and though a Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline produced a bulky report in 1906, it had not the smallest effect in restraining any parson who liked to be a law unto himself and become what Catholic and Protestant would for once have been agreed in describing as a marionette of Satan. All this was only part of the universal tendency towards extreme and aggressive militancy in every department of life. It was appropriately countered by a school of Protestants, who were equally determined to stick at nothing in order to enforce a conformity, that the Bishops could not or would not, to Reformation principles. Their leader was a certain Mr. Kensit, a draper's assistant turned publisher, who organized a band of earnest young men to stand up for Jesus by brawling in as many Ritualist churches as possible. Mr. Kensit was pursuing this stormy career at Liverpool, when a fellow-Christian, of like spirit but presumably differing opinions, launched a chisel with so true an aim that the Reformer was taken to hospital, where he died, though apparently from a different cause, so that his claim to a martyr's crown must remain in suspense.

What a game it was ! must be the reflection of any impartial spectator. These disputants lived in a world of their own, a world of pure make-believe, while the spirit of individual and collective egotism reigned supreme and almost unchallenged, driving the nations headlong to the suicide of civilization, and Christianity,

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with its authority undermined, had apparently no message of salvation for distracted humanity, but could only offer one of several competing brands of emotional dope.

CHAPTER II

THE LOPSIDEDNESS OF SCIENCE

If you had read any popular résumé of the progress of science late in the nineteenth century, you might have been struck by the constant recurrence of the word "Evolution". It is what, to the man in the street, science was most concerned about in its conflict with religion. But if, during the first decade of the twentieth century, you had tried to keep yourself *au fait* with the latest developments, you would have found another word occurring with equal or greater frequency. That word was Radium. And Radium had come to stand for the symbol of a veritable revolution, whose nature and consequences were as yet but dimly appreciated.

Already, before the end of the nineteenth century, everybody was talking about the wonderful X-rays, that enabled you to take a photograph of your sitter's skeleton, a practical demonstration of beauty being only skin deep that provided a useful plot for more than one up-to-date magazine writer. But these feats were but a prelude to something infinitely more momentous, for following up this line of discovery, scientists were not only able to investigate the inside of a solid body, but to find an inside to what had hitherto passed for the solid and indivisible atom. The discovery was similar to that of the revellers in *The Masque of the Red Death*, who, after pursuing the ghostly intruder from room to room, and finally cornering him and tearing off his mask and robe, found beneath them—nothing.

So with the atom. Far from being hard and solid,

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it turned out to be a reproduction in miniature of a vast vacancy containing a solar system, with planets no bigger in proportion than motes of dust in a cathedral, performing their evolutions round a tiny sun! But here the resemblance to sun and planets ended, for these motes were not solid things, nor indeed things at all, in any intelligible sense of the word, but tiny centres of electric energy—knots, as some scientists tried to explain it, in an all-pervasive and quite inconceivable ether. It was not yet known that these unthinkable planets had the even more wildly unthinkable power of jumping from orbit to orbit without passing through any of the space between.

To Herbert Spencer the annihilation of matter had been not only impossible, but a sheer inconceivability, as if 2 and 2 had made 3. But this newly discovered element, radium, was constantly radiating off minute portions of its unsubstantial substance, and the result was written off the books of matter as dead loss. "Mass", as Mr. Balfour put it, in his 1904 Presidential Address to the British Association, "is not only explicable, it is actually explained. So far from being an attribute of matter, considered in itself, it is due . . . to the relation between the electrical monads of which matter is composed and the ether in which they are bathed. So far from being unchangeable, it changes, when moving at very high speeds, with every change in its velocity."

All of which may have seemed of essentially technical interest, with no very obvious bearings on the claims of science to supersede religion by providing a sufficient answer to the riddle of the universe and a programme of salvation for mankind. There was more to excite than to relieve doubt in the thought of the physical basis of the universe being something not even imaginable. But if the atom had been dissolved, the solid and simple cosmos of the Victorian

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Rationalists had dissolved with it. Now that matter had ceased to be eternal, and time and space themselves were beginning to be called in question, it was at least more difficult to be cocksure about the capacity of average common sense to conquer all knowledge and all mysteries. The universe was, at any rate, a good deal less obvious than it had seemed to the great Freethinking Fathers whose works the Rationalist Press was popularizing in a series of admirable cheap reprints. There might yet be odd corners in which mystery could lurk—and perhaps a background of mystery behind it all. And out of it, perhaps, God, speaking as He spoke out of the whirlwind to Job. Or perhaps merely a vague feeling of awe, a religious emotion without any religion to fix it.

There was one consequence that, though perhaps not logical, had some practical importance. The shifting of interest from biology to physics had the effect of bringing the masters of physical science into the limelight, men less disposed to a dogmatic Rationalism than their comrades the biologists. Oliver Lodge was a seeker of an altogether different type from that of Ray Lankester.

But even in biology, the old Victorian confidence was beginning to evaporate. The greatness of Darwin became even more apparent as his figure receded into historical perspective, but the idea that natural selection was capable of accounting for all the facts of evolution, or that blind chance could possibly have effected the transition from mud to Man, was seen to be untenable, or at least premature. Darwin, like so many other scientists before him, had provided a working hypothesis that was justified—as the new school of philosophers would have put it—pragmatically, by the fact of its having stimulated progress in every department of biological science. Not even the most intransigent anti-Darwinian dreamed of putting back the clock to pre-Darwinian theory. But a working

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hypothesis is by no means the same thing as a final explanation, and it is no disparagement to Darwin to point out that he had but demonstrated the convenience, for most practical purposes, of assuming that species had originated in a certain way. But that he had proved such a development to have actually taken place, or succeeded in reconciling the whole of the facts with his hypothesis, was unscientific over-belief.

In the latter half of Queen Victoria's reign had flourished, not very conspicuously, an impish person whose delight it had been to bait the orthodox of both the religious and scientific camps. This Samuel Butler had had the impertinence to fire off at the Darwinians the simple conundrum—"How did the chicken learn to get out of the egg?" It was just such a question as the Almighty might have put to Job. But neither Darwin nor his apostles had the patience of Job, and they refused to give this outsider a serious or even a courteous hearing, in which they were perhaps wise—for the question was, from their standpoint, unanswerable. How *did* the chicken know?

There were various other conundrums that would have been equally hard to answer. By what process of natural selection was a butterfly enabled to paint his wing so as exactly to resemble a dead leaf, and what is more, a torn and disreputable leaf? It would be about as easy to imagine Ruskin's famous libel to be literally true, and that by throwing paint at canvas often enough, in the dark, you would presently hit upon a nocturne in blue and silver—or a Sistine Madonna. How did the electric eel get his battery, an organ that would have been a useless encumbrance for all the many generations that it was in process of completion? How did the various species of orchids, that Darwin himself had investigated, contrive such subtle and complicated plots as those by which they sought to secure fertilization of

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their stock? Bergson summed up the situation admirably when he described Darwinian selection as the building of houses by throwing stones.

Paley's famous comparison of the Universe to a watch on a heath, and his deduction of a watchmaker, may or may not have been sound reasoning, but if Paley could have come back to earth he would hardly have been convinced of his error, if he had been told that subsequent research had proved the watch to have been more wonderfully and intricately constructed than even he had suspected.

There remained the final question—how did life originate at all? The production of living from non-living matter continued to baffle the utmost ingenuity of scientists, and blind faith was the only thing to invoke, in default of an old-fashioned Creator, if the gap was to be bridged. At some time in the earth's history conditions *must* have existed to make the thing possible, and blind chance must have possessed a capacity it has apparently lost of making dead matter live. To say frankly that one could not fit this most vital of all transitions into one's scheme of the universe would have been too painful an admission. Blessed are they who have not proved and yet have believed!

The fact that Darwin was one of the greatest of all scientists did not prevent science from progressing beyond Darwin. But this by no means implied a swing back to any God conceivable by the Victorian orthodox. It was one thing to rule out blind chance as a sufficient explanation; it was quite another to cover the facts of evolution by a working alternative. As Mr. Langdon-Davies wittily suggests about the fertilizing tactics of a certain orchid, any Deity who inspired them must be conceived of as a cheery person with a French sense of humour.

The fact is that the Victorians, conscious of having made some useful discoveries, had jumped to the very human conclusion that they had com-

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passed in a few simple formulæ all that was worth knowing about the broad outlines of the Universe, and that it only remained for those who came after them to fill in the details. Whereas the real situation was just the reverse, for fresh light had undoubtedly been thrown on a myriad details, whereas the broad principles remained as mysterious as ever, or rather, more mysterious than ever, as fresh complications came to light in the course of universal progress, and fresh contradictions were suggested in every theory that could be framed to account for it.

The very conception of evolution, instead of stimulating the pride of intellect, as it had done with the Victorians, was, if its implications were thought out, calculated to have an exactly reverse effect, since the mind itself was a product of evolution, and had developed in rough and ready response to the prosaic requirements of animal nature.

Simple Simon went a fishing
For to catch a whale,
All the water he had got
Was in his mother's pail,

but even Simon did not imagine that he could explain the Universe, when all the mind he had got was that bequeathed him by Mother Monkey and Granny Mud !

It may well be asked, at this point, what precise relevance these fluctuations of scientific opinion have to the course of history. What has the Great War got to do with anyone's opinion about an electric eel ? or how is the question of a chicken getting out of an egg connected with that of civilization getting out of an unprecedented mess ? The answer—or at any rate one answer—is that the religious factor is of decisive historical importance and that what passes for science is often religious over-belief masking in scientific garb. This is inevitably the case when there is talk of conflict between science and religion, because in order for such a conflict to become conceivable,

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science must quit her true and impersonal rôle, and come down into the arena—not without dust and heat—as a rival religion.

It was not enough for the biologist Darwin to have revolutionized biology. Evolution had got to be a gospel, and Darwin—who had never dreamed of anything so ridiculous—its prophet, perhaps even a saviour. As evolution was but an inclusive word for everything that had ever happened, it could naturally be used to justify any future development that the user desired to see. Capitalists and communists, militarists and non-resisters, believers and atheists, all claimed evolutionary sanction with precisely equal justification. If this had been all, evolution would have been no more than a luxurious emphatic, like either of the two adjectives attached by the private soldier to nearly every noun he uses. But it was something more, for the authority of Darwin was freely lent, by his disciples, to the two following propositions :

(1) Blind chance is a sufficient explanation for everything that has ever happened. There is no purpose in, or behind, evolution. God, if He exists, is unknowable—though how anything whatever, even possible existence, can be asserted of the Unknowable, is not very clear.

(2) Far from it being true that love makes the world go round, it is a ruthless struggle for survival that has caused mud to become Man, and therefore¹ will cause Man to become Superman. It follows that war and national egoism, with its accompaniment of race hatred and prejudice, are good things in themselves, and that anybody who tries to remedy them is a rebel against science, an obscurantist heretic. It is curious that that last of the great Rationalist die-hards, Sir Arthur Keith, has lent his authority, as a Man of Science, to this terrific *credo*.

¹ A consequence flatly denied by Huxley.

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When the name of Science is more feared than that of God, the effect of such teachings in driving the world to suicide must be considerable, and it is of no small danger to mankind when specialists transgress the limits of their subject, and forsaking the indicative for the imperative mood, seek to order the affairs of men and nations by pseudo-scientific analogy.

By the early part of the twentieth century, the sweeping theories about evolution dear to the Victorians had gone out of fashion, and progress in biology had acquired the advantage of possessing no very obvious publicity value. It was plain that the Darwinian hypothesis in its original form was no longer adequate, though whether it could be reconstructed to accommodate the new facts, or whether chance would have to be abandoned, and design or purpose reintroduced as a final explanation, was still keenly controverted. But few echoes of such controversies penetrated to the market-place.

Biology was the science of life in its physical aspect, which may partly account for the materialistic bias of its leading exponents. But Man has a mind, and perhaps a spirit to be considered. People were accustomed to speak of Science as their fathers had spoken of God, as if it were by its very nature so beneficent and infallible as to be entirely above criticism. That might be well enough, in the sense that you can never have too much knowledge. But Science, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, had developed so irregularly as to constitute a dangerously lopsided mass of information. In all that concerned the knowledge and control of lifeless matter, it had advanced with giant strides during the last two centuries. As far as the body and its functioning were concerned, its progress, for the last half century, had been no less sensational. But mind and spirit—how far had Science advanced Man's knowledge of them? It was a simple case of demand

and supply. There had been an unprecedented demand for knowledge about things, but hardly any at all for light on the Inner Man. Such new light as was thrown on that had come from novelists and poets—the men and women of creative intuition. It was not the clear dry light of Science, and the resultant knowledge was not organized or cumulative, like that of the physicists, the chemists, and the biologists.

It is true that there had been much written in the nineteenth century about psychology, and a still younger science founded by the Positivist, Auguste Comte, and christened by Herbert Spencer Sociology. It was a Victorian delusion, that persisted into the Twentieth Century, that if you could only give a thing a long name, preferably ending in "ology," you had found out all that was worth knowing about it. As a science, sociology never got properly on to its feet at all, and merely became a word under which were lumped together a heterogeneous mass of speculation and research, preferably about the customs of savages, it being a sort of accepted convention that the nearer you got to the primitive, the more you were concerned with sociology. Your sociologist was intensely interested in Veddahs and Fugeians, not much concerned about Greeks¹—except when he contrived to regard them in the light of slightly sophisticated savages—and mercifully refrained, as a rule, from peeping and sociologizing on the graves of Florentines, Elizabethans, Sans-culottes and other inhabitants of the historian's province. This is not to say that an immense amount of valuable research was not accomplished that could be conveniently grouped, by *The Times Literary Supplement*, under the Sociology heading, but such research would have been as well—and perhaps better—done if the long word had never been invented. But to talk of

¹ A preference that may perhaps be not unconnected with the difficulty of acquiring a classical education.

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a science of sociology was the fallacy of inventing a word and then assuming that there must be some reality to justify it.

Science, then, had so far little or no light to throw upon Man in the mass. Its pretensions were somewhat greater to deal with man as an individual. There were bulky and elaborate treatises on psychology, and even a certain amount of experiment, with so far trivial results. But psychology, as taught in the universities, was a science still in the pre-Baconian stage of being hopelessly entangled with metaphysics, and overshadowed by the authority of famous wise men, from Democritus and Aristotle to Hegel and Hamilton, whose opinions were appealed to and discussed in every treatise on the subject. The result was that a treatise on psychology usually took the form of a prolonged word-spinning exercise in a jargon specially devised for the purpose.

If you turn up *Psychology* in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, you will find a perfect specimen of this kind of writing. To select one typical passage at random :

“Into the man’s head the whole world goes including the head itself. Such thoroughgoing ‘introjection’ affords no ground for subsequent ‘projection.’ Thus the endeavour to explain sensation overreaches itself : the external object or thing that was supposed to cause sensations and to be therefore distinct from them, was in the end wholly resolved into these and regarded as built out of them by sensation (Mill) or by apperceptive synthesis (Kant). But no ‘mental chemistry,’ no initial alchemy of ‘forms’ can generate objective reality from feelings or sense-impressions as psychophysically defined.”

Or if you want something a little more definite, take the following diagrammatic analysis of love and hate, by a Scottish psychologist of world-wide reputation :

“Let A be the object of a sentiment of hate, and B be the object of a sentiment of love ; and let α in our diagram stand for the complex neural disposition whose excitement underlies

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the idea or presentation of A, and let β be the corresponding disposition concerned in the presentation of B. Then we must suppose that α becomes intimately connected with R, F and P, the central nuclei of the instincts of repulsion, fear and pugnacity, and less intimately with C and S, those of curiosity and submission, and not at all with T, the central nucleus of the tender or paternal instinct ”

—after all which we are prepared for the supreme truth that if “ the reproductive instinct could be abolished in any people, that people would soon disappear from the face of the earth.”

And this is not some wild attempt to go one better than *Alice in Wonderland*, but occurs in a grave and authoritative treatise on Social Psychology, in which nobody, even south of the Tweed, could see anything at all funny during these opening years of the twentieth century.

There was certainly promise of better things in the work of the American psychologist, William James, who, as early as 1891, had published his great treatise linking up the science of the mind with that of the body and clearing away not a few metaphysical cobwebs. But the extracts already quoted show how little his influence had availed to get psychology out of its age-long ruts, and convert it into a living and progressive science, capable of being mentioned in the same breath with modern chemistry or biology.

This is a fact whose importance will be best appreciated by those who believe that the crying need of the time was for a mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to the revolution brought about by machinery in Man's environment. Science, that had helped Man towards the knowledge and conquest of things, had hardly begun to help him towards the knowledge and conquest of himself. The sciences advanced not in line, but *en echelon*, and while the sciences of things were forging ahead, going on from strength to strength, psychology had hardly moved off from the starting-point.

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The call of the Sphinx Environment to every living creature was "Adapt yourself or die." Science was hard at work, transforming Man's environment, and setting him ever more exacting problems of adaptation, but she was not at work transforming Man, for the sufficient reason that Man had never asked her to do so. And the proverb held—They who don't ask, don't get.

In the all-important science of adult education or mind-training there had not only been no advance, but actual retrogression since the Middle Ages. For then the inner man had been held of greater importance than his environment, and the Church had applied all her skill and science to taming the raw barbarian nature, and making savages into Christians. The rules of her monastic orders rank among the most elaborately-thought-out systems of mind-training ever devised, and the great centralized organization by which she sought to mould the minds of all who came beneath her influence was successful at least to the extent of planting firm and deep the foundations of Western civilization. But now the function of the religious bodies as mind-training agencies was almost in abeyance, even if they had been capable of adapting systems that had served well enough for primitive requirements to the far more exacting conditions of the modern age.

And the pathetic phenomenon was witnessed, of a blind and groping urge for the light finding no sage nor priest to guide it, but being exploited for commercial purposes by pushing business men. On both sides of the Atlantic there were many people who felt that if they could only find some way of making themselves more efficient human machines, they would, in an age of ferocious competition, be able to command more of the good things of life. The scientists, who knew so well how to calculate the strains of a bridge or the distance of a star, had

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apparently no particular information to impart on this subject. From the textbooks on psychology there was nothing to be got more definite than a headache.

But here stepped in the man of business : " You want a trained mind. And behold, I can deliver the goods ! Submit yourself to me in blind faith ; pledge yourself solemnly to secrecy ; drop a few guineas (the number will be revealed on application) into the slot ; and you shall be something more than wise, you shall be rich—your income will be doubled, trebled, quadrupled, like that of this clergyman in Rochdale or that chartered accountant at Watford." And thus what in the open market would have been one or two shilling's worth of printed matter would be purchased by the faithful for more than that number of pounds, and they would be privileged to conduct a secret correspondence with priests of the mystery, whose salaries might, if revealed, turn out to exceed the wildest dreams of avarice, or else, as Mr. Belloc might say,

" they would not—
I cannot be positive which."

It was, of course, a revival of the old mystery cults, with all the romance and spiritual fervour extracted, and run with a sole eye to creating and exploiting a demand. No doubt a good many of the clients did improve their minds to some extent by the mere fact of being stimulated to obtain their money's worth. In this the secret mind-trainer had the advantage over the tipster, whose clients could not, within the limits of the law, do anything to secure the victory of the fancies handed out to them. But the mere fact of the systems being secret, and withdrawn from public criticism, must have created an almost irresistible temptation to substitute mental stunts for sound, but less sensational, methods.

These systems, more numerous in America than

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in England, would not be worth a passing mention, were it not for the fact that their virtual monopoly of mind-training implied something like the bankruptcy of twentieth-century science on the mental side. There were no doubt patent medicines for the body as well as the mind, but for the body alone there were also qualified doctors, and a healing art whose technique nobody dreamed of shrouding in mystery.

It was not a question, as ardent controversialists imagined, of whether Science, in the abstract, was or was not a good thing. The science of any given time is no abstract conception, but represents a definite sum of knowledge and achievement. He is not her enemy who maintains that a lopsided or unevenly developed science may be no blessing, but a deadly menace.

The fact that Man had conquered external Nature without any serious attempt to comprehend or conquer human nature, meant that he had armed himself not only with the power of destroying his civilization, but with the effective though blind will to put that power to the proof.

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH FICTION

As long ago as 1832 the term psychological had been applied by the still youthful Disraeli to one of his novels, *Contarini Fleming*. All through the nineteenth century, men of letters, and particularly of fiction, had been pushing their researches deeper and deeper into the obscure places of the soul. Style itself had needed to be refined and twisted, sometimes out of intelligibility, in order to express accurately the subtlest nuances of character. Browning had led the way with his monologues and literary dramas. George Meredith had followed with a style that sacrificed all pretence of realism, and served as a means for putting on to paper things that had hitherto defied expression. Meredith's characters lived in a world in which everybody was perpetually scintillating Meredithian, and in which nobody was capable of dropping for a sentence into the obvious. For those whose brains were capable of functioning on these levels, it was a fascinating world to inhabit, and none the less so from being like nothing on this platitudinous earth.

An even more elaborate psychological technique was developed by that Anglophile American, Henry James, and at the beginning of the century was approaching its extreme pitch of refinement. James had none of Meredith's rank almost Rabelaisian vitality. Oscar Wilde had talked of existing beautifully. The people in Henry James's world—and most of all in that of his later novels—were freed from the necessity or desire for any occupation more

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strenuous than that of existing subtly, distinguishing, and dissecting and refining upon moods, or splitting moral hairs invisible to the workaday human.

The Belgian dramatist-philosopher, Maeterlinck, had succeeded in improving even upon this technique, by conjuring up a world deliberately emptied of reality, investing characters and places with names evocative of no one country or period, but suggesting phantoms of the subconsciousness, into which some dim and fugitive life has been breathed. It was a drama of pure thought, or rather, of what lies at the back of thought. But unlike James, Maeterlinck was destined to tend towards an increasing realism with advancing years.

Meredith, the later James, and the earlier Maeterlinck, had this in common, that they had resort to an artificial world created to serve as a field for psychological expression. But another school was coming to the fore which aimed at combining penetration of character with minutest fidelity to the bare facts of life. Thomas Hardy had showed the way in his Wessex novels, which are not only profound studies of the human soul in conflict with destiny, but also serve as a unique historic memorial of the Wessex countryside. There were other influences at work. The Russian novel, and especially those of Tolstoi, had showed how it was possible to create an illusion of reality by childlike fidelity of description, and at the same time to strip the soul bare. And the French realists, headed by Zola, had resorted to so indiscriminating an accumulation of objective detail as to cause Nietzsche to sum up Zola in the simple phrase—or, in German, the simple word—"delight to stink." And yet who, like Zola, has performed the admittedly unsavoury process of uncovering whatever soul may appertain to the French peasant? Who, like him, has stripped the pomp, pride and circumstance from modern war and revealed that abomination in all its

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unspeakable foulness, and yet with a restraint and scientific austerity that make even a Remarque and a Sheriff seem journalists by comparison? After all, it is not usually charged against sanitary inspectors that they evince any particular delight in the perfumes they disclose.

Literature in the new century was evincing a marked disposition to enter into wedlock with Science. In the nineties, Mr. Kipling had amazed everybody by the uncanny exactitude of his acquaintance with machinery. He would sing as melodiously of crank shafts and dynamos, as former bards of bosoms and roses. Mr. Kipling's interest in machinery was, in fact, precisely of that kind. He was the last of the great Victorian romantics. Romance came up to him even with the 9.15. To a genuine modern, it is more probable that the 9.15 would have brought up unhygienic overcrowding in out-of-date coaches, clouds of filthy coal smoke, and perhaps the thought of a capitalist society puffing and clanking to its doom.

More in the true modern spirit was Mr. H. G. Wells. As Spinoza had been god-drunken, so of Mr. Wells it may be said that he was science-drunken. He had, significantly enough, served his apprenticeship in biology, and throughout his life retained the biologist's characteristic abhorrence of anything savouring of the mystic or supernatural. He approached his long consideration of life from the angle of the nineteenth-century Rationalist. But he had also some of the delighted curiosity of a child turned loose in a shop of mechanical toys. He had that confident, morning sense of up-to-dateness that only one who has lived in the *fin de siècle* can recapture, even in memory. Science was making all things new; there was no limit to her possibilities. Mr. Wells's imagination was early at work, with a furious intensity, giving these possibilities concrete and visible form. Queen Victoria's subjects should understand what

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sort of a world Science was capable of making for their children.

In all this there was nothing to distinguish Mr. Wells from a score of other writers, except his technical competence and imaginative fertility. The originality, that was destined to make his perhaps the most potent of all influences shaping thought in the new age, was betrayed in his refusal to assume, as a matter of course, that by making all things new, Science was necessarily making them better. That assumption was the starting-point of practically every other visionary of the scientific future. Just as in the ages of Christian faith, writers and artists had vied with one another in depicting the joys of heaven, so now the fashion was to conjure up the dream of a heaven on earth, which had the slight disadvantage that all those who desired to see it would be well and truly extinct before it was destined to materialize. So that people enjoyed it in much the same way as they enjoyed the pictures of high life in their weekly magazines. Everybody would, in effect, become possessed of a talisman, a table-be-covered, the power of locomotion at any pace, height, or depth, and perhaps, even, in time, an elixir of life. And everyone would be exceedingly happy, beautiful and wise. It was usually assumed that they would dress and look rather like ancient Greeks. Beards would come back into fashion. . . . And, though it was nowhere specifically stated, the coming race would presumably have discovered how to exist in a world where nothing particular happened except being wise and happy and beautiful, without getting even the least bit bored.

It was only when advancing years had taken off the keen edge of even Mr. Wells's seemingly inexhaustible creativeness, that he began to give rein to visions of this sort. It is just such a future world as he describes in *The Dream*, which might, as far as the future is concerned, be re-named *The Nightmare*.

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But in the series of novels in which Mr. Wells first began to bring the Future back to the Present, there was a very different tale to tell. Science, to Mr. Wells, was no beneficent fairy, but a djinn of unlimited power, which, if he were not controlled, would be capable of destroying those who had been rash enough to call him up, and laying waste their whole world. Mr. Wells's first visions of conquering science were prospects of sheer horror.

He started by a book in which he anticipated, by a generation, the view of time, as a fourth dimension, that was destined to receive scientific confirmation in the discoveries of Einstein. He allowed his hero, and therefore his reader, to rob Death of his sting by travelling backwards and forwards at will through the future. He starts off by time-hogging through some few milleniums, and has a dim vision *en route* of vast and magnificent buildings—symbolic of the triumph of Science. And then at last he stops, to find—what? An upper world peopled by pretty, half-witted dwarfs, and an underworld in which the machines are still at work, tended by stunted monsters, unable to bear the light, who come up at night to catch and eat those others. And then at the next stop, even this remnant of humanity is long extinct, and gigantic crabs sidle heavily about in a world without any future but—and we have one desolating glimpse of it—a dying sun and softly falling snow, and some last living thing flopping aimlessly up and down on a frozen sandbank.

In a subsequent book, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and in one of his *Tales of Space and Time*, Mr. Wells allows us to stop only some two centuries ahead, and to see the triumph of Science at its culminating-point. Here we have roofed and towering cities, with the descendants of the capitalist class leading a life of parasitic luxury up above, while far below, shut out from the light of day, and without even the means

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of easy suicide, the workers tend the machines in conditions of unspeakable misery.

Science is no more beneficent when she enables a ghastly Doctor, in one of Mr. Wells's other early novels, to transform beasts into even more bestial humans, when she endows a man with the gift of invisibility, to his own bodily and spiritual destruction, or when she furnishes a race of ruthless intelligent cuttle-fish from Mars, with the means of wiping out all mankind except those who are reserved to have the blood sucked from their living bodies.

Such was the attitude of Mr. Wells to Science at the opening of the new century. And it was his constant preoccupation throughout his subsequent career to save mankind from the fate of the mechanic who is caught up and crushed in his own machinery. How could Progress be directed scientifically towards Utopia? Mr. Wells was temperamentally incapable of joining Tolstoi and Edward Carpenter in turning his back upon Science, as upon an accursed thing, and seeking to revert to primitive conditions. He must need be a worshipper at her shrine, even if she should prove a goddess of destruction. And so he addressed himself repeatedly to the problem—whether or not we are to credit him with a plausible solution—of devising a social order calculated to make Science not a curse, but a blessing to mankind. Moreover, his increasing preoccupation with educational problems shows that he at least recognized the necessity of training up men capable, intellectually and morally, of running a scientific world.

Mr. Wells's didactic suggestions for reforming human nature are perhaps the most unconvincing part of his work. He toys with the idea of creating what we should now call an order of Fascists—at the time of the Japanese victory they are of course Samurai—but to the profane mind the scheme appears to be one for intensive cultivation of prigs. He has

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much to say about public libraries, guilds of literature, examinations, courses, and all the generally accepted means of standardizing personality on the most approved middle-class lines. In fact we never feel quite sure whether Mr. Wells is not, at heart, more desirous of suppressing than of developing the individual, of turning men into efficient team workers, nicely subordinated cells in the tissues of the social body.

Whatever liberties Mr. Wells might desire to take with other people's individuality, nothing could rob him of his own. He might preach standardization, but he was the last man to put it into practice. He brought a scientific curiosity and method to the study of personality that make his novels, at their best, documents of the utmost psychological significance. Like Mr. Bernard Shaw on the stage, so he, in the novel, had the faculty of regarding individuals in their relation to the social order, and in the most inspired, at any rate, of his creations, without sacrifice of individuality. With Mr. Wells, the theorist, we are never very far from the Bolshevik championship of the State against the soul; but in some at least of the novels we feel the beauty of the Greek ideal, that the individual can only rise to the full stature of his personality as a member of the community.

Another novelist of the scientific school was Arnold Bennett. Greater than Mr. Wells as a technician of his craft, he was far less in the scope of his vision and the height of his ambition. But in one sense he was even more of a psychologist. For he applied scientific method, with the utmost intensity of concentration, to the shaping of his own career. The most successful of Arnold Bennett's creations was the clerk in a solicitor's office, who determined to achieve material success by the simple process of driving a pen, and did so with the punctual efficiency of a well-constructed machine, with fame and a chance of im-

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mortality as by-products. He had no time for the frills and thrills of the ordinary best-seller. He would write of what he knew best by experience, would fearlessly set himself to describe Philistine lives in the drabest and dingiest of industrial hives. And by sheer, concentrated honesty of description he succeeded in building up in the reader's mind the consciousness that these people, even these, had souls, and that beneath the smoky canopy of the Five Towns were fires of passion and threads of tragedy for those who had eyes to see. Arnold Bennett had none of the Victorian decency that averts its eyes from the unpleasing things of life; he had all the scientist's austere determination to get to grips with the facts, whatever they might be. And perhaps for that very reason, he succeeds in convincing us that God's image, however befouled and battered, never quite loses the stamp of its original.

Another literary psychologist was the Polish seaman, Conrad, one of the two writers of this time—Rabindranath Tagore being the other—who accomplished the miracle of writing lovely and sensitive prose in what, for them, was an alien tongue. Conrad was more of a conscious artist than Bennett—too fastidiously conscious was the opinion of some who found themselves bewildered by the manifold and indirect approaches that he sometimes elected to make to his main narrative. But he had the same intense concentration on the subtleties of character, the same determination to probe and dissect till he had laid the very soul bare for inspection. And like Bennett—only to an even greater extent, since Bennett had other areas to explore than that of the Staffordshire Potteries—Conrad followed the modern scientific tendency towards specialization. He wrote almost exclusively of the sea, and of the merchant service to which he had belonged. Other authors, in plenty, had written books of adventure on the same theme.

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But Conrad's books, like Herman Melville's, were all but unique in nautical literature, in focusing the main interest upon adventures of the spirit.

The scientific study of the mind was thus being pursued with decidedly more fruitful results by the intellectual pick of the novelists than by the scientists themselves. But these results could not, by the nature of the case, form part of an accepted and growing body of scientific truth. It was only by suggesting fresh points of view that the creator of fiction could be of help to the psychologist. But there is always hope that where intuition has blazed the trail, Science will sooner or later drive the road.

Even so, no perceptible approach had been even suggested to the task of adapting human nature to the requirements of a new age, unless we are to count the various commercial mystery cults advertised as mind-training. And though "Adapt or die" had, for countless millions of years, been the law of life, nobody dreamed of breaking out into the Pilgrim's lamentable cry of "What shall I do to be saved?" For who, in those piping times, would have thought of Western civilization as of a vast City of Destruction?

CHAPTER IV

THE JOURNALIZATION OF THOUGHT

The Edwardian Era, with its pendant of the pre-War years of George V's reign, is a time of which it is peculiarly difficult to capture any unified impression. In spite of the immensely longer length of the Queen's reign, it seems easier to understand what is meant by the Victorian than the Edwardian standpoint. This is no doubt because the Victorians were more conscious of having something definite to stand upon. One can say that Tennyson and Kingsley, Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, had a Victorian sameness beneath all their differences, and that the sameness was fundamental. Would it be possible to make the same remark about Mr. Wells and Mr. Masfield and Rupert Brooke? No doubt a case might be put even for this, but it would not be nearly such an obvious case. It would not be wholly paradoxical to say that the Edwardians were most alike in being all different.

"I suppose," a Conservative member had said during the Bradlaugh controversy, "we all have a God of some kind"—but it would have taken an incredibly complacent Backswoodsman to have ventured on such a remark in the nineteen-hundreds. It was not only a question of God, but of any sort of fixed belief. Opinion, at least among the intelligentsia, was in a state of unprecedented flux. A society of Cambridge men, desirous of being perfectly abreast of the times, displayed something like genius in taking to themselves the title of Heretics; this would have been as incredible a pose, in an earlier

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age, as if now these same young men had called themselves the Cowards, the Cads, or the Dirties. It did not in the least matter whether or not you were right, provided everybody else thought you wrong. But heresy was not long in becoming a super-orthodoxy more tyrannous than orthodoxy itself. There was an unbending convention of conventions to be defied, an idolatry of prescribed iconoclasm. Under this new tyranny the old freedom drooped and died. No freethinker would have dared assert his freedom to subscribe to the Creed, let alone the Articles. And though in the Victorian heyday there had never failed to be individualists capable of pulling a hair out of Tennyson's beard, one would have liked to hear the up-to-date Edwardian who would have dared rise up and eulogize him.

The drivell and belch and stink of Tennyson.

Such was the typically up-to-date line of the typically up-to-date bard, and it was in vain for Mr. Watson, who must have felt a kind of vested interest in the Tennysonian tradition, to vociferate,

Here was a bard shall outlive you all.

The up-to-date needed its little time to drivell and belch and stink itself out of date before the truth of the words could be appreciated.

The Edwardians, if they were incapable of making up their minds what to believe, could at least attain a considerable measure of agreement on what not to believe. It is not without its significance that some of the most memorable work of the time was accomplished in the field of satire; Mr. Chesterton's lines to F. E. Smith will bear comparison with the best of Pope and Dryden for their annihilating finality. Mr. Belloc's *Emmanuel Burden* is more informative about the politics and finance of the time than any orthodox history; Mr. E. V. Lucas's laughter about Trans-

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atlantic methods of boosting the "Insidecompleteuar Britanniaaware" only needed the tang of malice to make it equally memorable, while, in spite of the unaccountable oblivion into which they have fallen, Sir Mark Sykes's skits on the Drill Book and the monthly magazines are among the most devastating things in modern literature.

It was a *cliché* of the time that it was one of transition. But this rather implied that there was somewhere to go to, whereas all that was really certain was that the old order of things had been left definitely behind. In a surprisingly short time after the old Queen's death, the reaction against everything Victorian had completely triumphed. The great Victorian figures had become symbols of an orthodoxy that was anathema. They had not yet developed into the row of gigantic Aunt Sallies at whom every hack in Grub Street could have a remunerative shy—that was only destined to come about after Lytton Strachey's unerring hand had launched the first four cudgels. The Edwardians had not yet quite discovered the secret of getting at their predecessors, except by the thrusting out of an occasional tongue. It was more a question of ignoring than of dethroning them. Tennyson and Ruskin, Gladstone and Arnold, quietly faded out of fashion, like the frock-coat—that they could ever be pilloried as humbugs stood not yet within the prospect of belief. One great Victorian whose popularity remained proof against all vicissitudes was Dickens, and we might perhaps add Disraeli.

In what did the men of this time believe, and what dream of the future did they hope to realize? Of most of them it might be said that they no longer believed in anything very definite, and that they were content to chance the future. Things were all right for the moment, and he who looked beyond the moment was a fool, asking for trouble. Nay, more,

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he was a public nuisance, who went about jarring nerves that were already on edge. No one, surely, who remembers that time, can have forgotten, unless he is abnormally insensitive, the apprehension, never very far below the threshold, of some approaching peril—it might be German, it might be Red or even Yellow, but in any case destined to break the continuity of the safe and prosperous life of those who could afford to live it. That is what lends its enduring quality to Sir Edward Elgar's symphony commemorating the death of Edward VII, and thunder-charged with an apprehension not yet to be named. An alternative title might well be, "Second Thoughts on Hope and Glory." In a world where nothing was sacred, nothing certain—could anything be safe? It was a gay age, but with something of the hectic gaiety that one can imagine in the latter stages of Belshazzar's Feast.

And yet the last thing that the Edwardians aspired to do was to take calm stock of the situation and its perils, with a view to setting their house in order while there was yet time. That would have entailed an amount of concentrated thought and effort quite alien to the spirit of the time. Their instinct was to leave the morrow to take thought for the things of itself, and fling themselves into the moment with a zest that became agonizing in its endeavour to extract the last drop of life's honey while the flower yet bloomed.

I have already ventured to compare the edifice of Victorian civilization to Beckford's "Abbey" mansion at Fonthill, with its vast proportions and decorative prodigality—but without foundations. One might go on to liken the Edwardian civilization to that architecture of exhibition and pleasure palaces that formed so prominent a feature of the time, an architecture that did not even pretend to foundations nor aspire to permanence, but aimed, by means of

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stucco and gilding and coloured lights, at giving the jaded office worker and servant-girl their shillings-worth of illusion, by transporting them, for one brief evening, to something that might pass for fairyland, with its court of honour, its Alpine scenery, and magic stairs that moved by themselves, all spick and span and up-to-date.

Nothing in that age, not even civilization itself, was made to last. God, the God whom it was no longer fashionable to take seriously, had at least stood for permanence. The Victorian morality, with its fictions and taboos, had aimed at imparting a lasting quality to human relationships. Victorian genius had taken itself seriously—the very mahogany was solid. But now a generation was coming to maturity whose minds had been nourished on the tit-bits and stunts of the new journalism. And the journalese habit of relying on repeated and disconnected stimuli had, in an astonishingly short time, come to prevail. It was a time for sensation and not for reflection.

No longer was it safe even for genius to take itself or its mission seriously, greatness was coming to be regarded as a Victorian fashion that had gone out, and was only to be tolerated in recognized survivals, such as Thomas Hardy.¹ Mr. Wells was never more representative of his time than when he set himself to war against the bare notion that such a thing as a great man had ever existed, or ever could exist. To war on greatness was, in fact, necessary for Mr. Wells's ideal of de-individualizing mankind, that the community might be all in all. It was not till after the War that he gave himself the pleasure of knocking Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, and the other great historical figures, into so many paper cocked-hats.

¹ The appearance of *The Dynasts*, whose boasting by the *cognoscenti* showed about as much sense of critical proportion as the denigration of *Tess*, may be said to mark Hardy's reception into the Order of Panjandrum.

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But in his fantasia, *Boon*, published shortly after the War had broken out, he trounced the whole conception of greatness in a manner that at least entitles him to rank among the great satirists of a period of great satire.

Mr. Wells was not by any means the only Tarquin who delighted in flicking off the heads of all the tallest poppies. It was not altogether by accident that Samuel Butler, the self-styled *enfant terrible* of literature, only came posthumously into his own in the new century. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who was perhaps more influenced by Butler than any other author, not only preached, but practised irreverence, his favourite target of all being Shakespeare, whose worship he stigmatized as bardolatry, though his objection did not appear to rest on a much more tangible basis than the Athenian voter's dislike of always hearing Aristides called "The Just." Still it was excellent advertisement, if not very convincing argument, to chalk up casual Billingsgate on the tombs of the bard's contemporaries—to call Webster a fool and a cut-throat, Fletcher a penny-a-liner, Chapman a blathering and Jonson a brutish pedant. The significant part of such scintillations is that while in an earlier age they would have been enough to damn Mr. Shaw's reputation in spite of his genius, it is probable that among Mr. Shaw's contemporaries they did more even than his genius to enhance it. This sort of thing was so naughty, so modern, so quite, in fact, too thrilling for words.

Another and rather more subtle form of iconoclasm, only destined to reach its full development with the post-War mass-production of biography, was called humanization. To humanize a celebrity was to reduce him to the lowest human denominator. This art was still in a comparatively primitive stage, for no one, before the War, would have dared invent a dipsomaniac Gordon or a goatish Gladstone, but

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it was coming to be pretty extensively practised, if only because it requires less concentration to listen to the sort of tale that any valet can spin about his master's foibles, than to rise to an understanding of that element in a great man's personality and achievement that constitutes his greatness. And concentration, in an age dominated by journalism, is the thing of all others to be avoided by the ordinary reader.

The masterpiece of humanization, in the pre-Strachey era, was constituted by Frank Harris's attempt to introduce his contemporaries to "the Man, Shakespeare"—it is to be noted that in the terminology of humanization the dethroned genius is always "The Man." Harris was an adventurer to whose career—at least as reported by himself—the stock journalese epithet, "amazing," was strictly applicable. As Oscar Wilde said of him, "Frank Harris has been received in all the great houses—*once*." He was one of those meaty, full-blooded individuals with heavy moustaches who flourished with peculiar rankness about the end of the last century. He was troubled—he never made any secret about it—by an inordinate development of his carnal affections. He saw everything coloured and distorted through glasses of sex. And by cogitation on the plays, he compiled to his own satisfaction the biography of a highly sexualized and all too human Shakespeare. The only person about whom such a portrait could be in the least degree informative was Harris himself. As with Mr. Shaw's criticisms of the Elizabethans, the real significance of Harris's Shakespeare lay in the gladness with which it was received. An extract from one typical review will suffice as a sample—"Thus is Shakespeare brought to earth." That was the spirit of the worthy Jacobins who had proposed to destroy the Cathedral of Chartres, "because it dominates too much the republican town." Mr. Everyman rejoiced greatly to see Shakespeare

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brought down to his own level ; it was in nobody's interest to discover that the fallen idol was Harris himself, in a suit of trunk hose hired from Clarkson's.

It would not have been so bad if the levelling business had stopped short at reputations. Strafing Shakespeare after all benefited the iconoclast more than it hurt the Bard. But it was a different matter when thought itself was reduced to the least common denominator by undergoing a process of journalization in order to make it palatable to the mob. It must be observed that the intellectual leaders of the age were now beginning to be sharply divided off into two definite classes—academic and popular. There were the pure specialists, who held academic or official posts and who devoted their energies to claims staked out in the field of some particular science, claims that tended to become ever more restricted as the sum of accumulated knowledge increased. These specialists wrote in a jargon of their own to an audience of fellow-specialists ; they had honour among their peers and did not aspire to be appreciated by the ordinary layman. The race of the great scientists of letters, the Huxleys, the Tyndalls, the Cliffords, was almost extinct at the beginning of the century. Even history, under the auspices of Lord Acton, Professor Bury, and the compilers of *The Cambridge Modern History*, was ceasing to be the province of man of letters, and—officially at any rate—was being turned over to teams of academic specialists.

This was all to the good, in so far as it preserved the peace that ought to reign in the realms of Science, and kept her devotees from the temptation of tout-ing for applause in the market-place, but the isolation of science from culture, and of scientists themselves in closed compartments of specialism, was not without its dangers. In the human sciences especially, as well as in the philosophy that ought to be the crown

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of all science, it might easily come to pass that the experts would form a caste completely out of touch with living reality, all talking the same jargon and in a tacit conspiracy to allow its verbal counters to pass current for reality. We have seen to what an output of wastepaper coinage this might lead in the realm of psychology. Again, the restriction of vision to the intensive study of one limited field might easily tend to a sort of academic provincialism, because the part can only be understood in its relation to the whole, and he who never takes his eyes off one object does not see even that clearly or in proportion. There is no tyranny to compare, for sheer wrong-headedness, with that of the expert.

The withdrawal of the specialist from contact with the educated public created a demand for enlightenment from some more accessible source. It was not likely that the ordinary man, and still less that the ordinary woman, with any pretensions to culture, would forgo the right to think and be informed about the scientific progress that was making all things new and, as they firmly believed, better and better. There must be a culture of the market-place as well as a jargon of the schools. There must be guides and philosophers who would talk in a language understood of the people and who would adapt not only their language but their methods of thought to the journalese standards of the market-place.

To this necessity even genius had to bow, if it wished for a hearing. It was a bitterly true saying of Mr. Bernard Shaw's that the sceptic who is cautiously feeling his way towards the next century has no chance unless he happens to have the specific talent of the mountebank as well, in which case it is as a mountebank that he catches votes. Not only in commerce, but in life and thought, it was a time of quick returns. Even the philosopher—unless he liked to turn his back on the world and talk academic

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shop about resurrecting Hegel or defining the Absolute—was expected to score his points quickly and pungently, and to be judged, as at an election meeting, by the laughter or applause of an audience that could not be bothered to reflect.

It was putting too great a strain, even on genius, to subject it to such a yoke. It is at least to some extent true that the public gets the authors it deserves. For between author and public there is a continual interchange of stimulus ; they are, in a sense, partners. And if the public is incapable of playing up to its author, the author will sooner or later start playing down to his public. He will score as he is expected to score, and not waste his time on unappreciated subtleties, nor strain his mind's eye with gazing into depths into which nobody but himself can spare so much as a glance.

This was the more to be regretted because, in these early days of the century, the leaders of popular thought, whom the market-place at least had enough discrimination to honour, were men whose genius would have adorned any period in history. It was the heyday of that great triumvirate, Messrs. Shaw, Wells, and Chesterton, each of whom—as far as any such prediction is possible about contemporaries—has accomplished work whose enduring quality is proof against any conceivable revaluation. All three possessed, in overflowing measure, that quality of vital energy that is almost essential to genius, and each displayed it in an obviously unaffected delight in horseplay, or sheer, extravagant nonsense. However much any of us may presume to criticize or dissent from their writings, it is hardly possible to peruse a page—with the exception of obvious journalistic pot-boiling—without the sense of contact with a supernormally fertile and suggestive mind. Say what you will, here is God's plenty.

But from so large a debt of gratitude, a certain

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deduction must be made, in view of what can only be described as the debasing of the coinage of thought by the alloy of journalism. It was no doubt a case of necessity—the public got the metal for which it clamoured—but, as the present generation is not unlikely to discover, the effects of debasing coinage are not in the least degree affected by the straits or intentions of the debaser. The important point is that the Triumvirate, assisted by scores of lesser writers, was extending to the higher regions of thought the process that Harmsworth, Newnes, and their like had begun in the lower. Just as the pundits of the nursery professed to teach reading without tears, so those of the market-place had somehow to find, on pain of losing their audience, a way of sweetening thought by cutting out the necessity for concentration.

It would be possible to illustrate a whole treatise on how to secure assent without reflection, entirely with examples from the works of these authors, and others of the same period resembling them in everything but genius. A couple of random examples must suffice here. Mr. Chesterton talks of “Dickens, the greatest of whose glories was that he could not describe a gentleman,”—a splendid sentence to round off a chapter, one that has no doubt stimulated many a gasp of delighted appreciation before the page has been turned over. If any reader had been so eccentric as to leave the page alone until he had turned over the sentence in his mind, he must have perceived that he was being made the victim of bluff. The glory of an author, let alone the greatest glory of one of the greatest of authors, can hardly consist in his having failed to master any part of his craft. Besides, it is a pointless libel on Dickens to invest him with such a glory, and if Mr. Chesterton had seriously convinced himself that Sir Leicester Dedlock, for instance, and Twemlow, are incompetently delineated, it was surely up to him to have persuaded his reader’s

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judgment, instead of attempting to stun it with an assertion.

Or let us take an example of Mr. Shaw's method of argument. He is pursuing his customary course of taking some accepted opinion, and asserting, in the most unqualified manner, its exact opposite—no doubt an excellent way of scoring sensations. The contrast is between England and Ireland, and the point to be established is that the Irishman is by nature, or rather by climate, a clear-headed realist, and the Englishman a muddle-headed sentimentalist. To prove this, Wellington is set up as "an intensely Irish Irishman" against Nelson as "intensely English Englishman". Of course the intensely Irish Irishman might just as easily have been Goldsmith or Burke or Sheridan, and the intensely English Englishman Sir Robert Walpole, or the younger Pitt, or Lord Salisbury. But the sleight of hand is no doubt good enough to enable Mr. Shaw to pass off an incredible stage ass, in the shape of Tom Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island*, as this typical Englishman, and then, by a really superb piece of audacity, to review the reviewers of his play under the caption "How Tom Broadbent took it."

Mr. Shaw and Mr. Chesterton thus succeeded in creating a style that was singularly well adapted to the demands of their age and audience. Every paragraph, and almost every sentence, was designed to act as a violent stimulus, to keep the reader perpetually alert and surprised. The form of neat intellectual brandy provided by paradox was administered in constantly repeated doses, and the more violent and even outrageous the stimulus, the more favourable was the reaction likely to be. It was necessary to adopt a deceptive transparency of statement, to give the effect of hitting the nail exactly on the head every time or of having brought off a series of neat conjuring tricks. Such was the art of the successful

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platform orator scoring off hecklers—an art of which Mr. Shaw himself was a past-master. But its whole secret depended on reflection being eliminated. The conjurer hurries on to the next trick and the orator to the next point as soon as the applause has subsided. It is only by a tedious process of following the argument point by point, and checking and examining each separate statement, that the trick can be detected. In a hurried and unreflective age such a method of exposure is not likely to be popular, or indeed practicable.

Who indeed was likely to undertake the task? An author, once his fame was fairly established, was as immune from exposure as a patent medicine, and for much the same reasons. His reputation was a valuable vested interest, not only to himself but to his publisher, and indirectly, to the newspaper proprietor in whose columns the book was advertised. From a business point of view, there was nothing to gain and a good deal to be lost by tilting at an established reputation. The advertisers did not like it; the public did not want it; the critic himself was usually an author and dependent on the goodwill of his fellow-authors. Reviewers who made trouble were seldom in active demand with editors. There was scope enough for candour at the expense of that great army of the "unnarrived" whose struggles to find a market for their works were a stock joke of the magazines. In dramatic criticism, the assimilation of reviews to advertisements went so far that one of the great evening papers was actually threatened with a libel action on account of a first night criticism which, though in no sense a slating, had its praise sufficiently qualified to be likely, in the manager's opinion, to decrease box-office receipts. The editor stood firm, and with such a flourish of trumpets as to provide the main item of an evening's entertainment—but in face of such an experience, no

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editor, who valued a quiet life, would have any reason, except one of quite unprofitable principle, for allowing his critics to fall foul of the next highly capitalized musical comedy at a leading West End theatre. This was no doubt an extreme case, but no one who has followed the course of twentieth-century journalism can doubt that—however many and honourable the exceptions—the tendency has inevitably been for criticism to follow the line of least financial resistance. As Mr. Bernard Shaw's typical critic puts it, "If it's a good author, it's a good play"—or, of course, book.

Mr. Shaw himself and his peers had, by long and uphill endeavour, won to the position of good authors, and they had their reward in the ability to get away with anything in, and a good many things beyond, reason, without fear of serious criticism. But even these untroubled heights are not without their dangers. It has been said, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." If the genius has risen by virtue of his specific talent as a mountebank, and has only to go on performing his acrobatics in public to command wealth, fame, and a hope full of immortality—if, in short, he has gained all the world has to offer, then, indeed, it is time for him to look to his soul.

But real life is no Faustian melodrama, in which souls are either saved or damned outright, nor, when the coinage of thought is debased, does it necessarily follow the course of the mark or the ruble. Genius usually contrives to strike some sort of compromise between God and Mammon, though as the sound medieval practice of putting down the thing in black—or rather red—and white has been abandoned, the agreement is apt to be a rather confused and fluctuating affair. It was not the mountebank in Mr. Shaw who crowned the achievement of a lifetime with *Saint Joan*—but it was the old mountebank who raised the old cackle by trotting out the old "typical" cock-

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shy Englishman, the Britannicus-Swindon-Broadbent-Stephen Undershaft-Edstaston in his latest incarnation as Stogumber. And perhaps it was neither the genius nor the mountebank, but merely the journalist in a hurry, who produced the philosophy of the Life Force, which is neither life, nor force, but our old friend, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Deity, dressed up in a suit of motley, and never quite able to make up His mind whether to be an impersonal principle, or a rather unprincipled person capable of setting traps like any pimp or matchmaking mamma.

It is undoubtedly the journalist in a hurry who time and again stepped in to mar the great work that Mr. Wells set himself to accomplish in pointing the way out of chaos to a world order based on rational and scientific principles, and the even greater work of educating his contemporaries towards fitness for such a Utopia. If only he could have cut down the quantity of his work by purging it of ill-considered and half-baked accretions, could he have eliminated, by a species of psycho-analysis, one or two innate and recurrent prejudices of an emotional origin, how greatly would its permanent value have been enhanced! If, finally, Mr. Chesterton had been able, to prevent his trick of paradox from becoming his tyrant instead of his slave, had he been able to substitute the detachment of the philosopher for the bias of the propagandist, had he relied a little more on facts and a little less on verbal gymnastics, how great a service might he not have accomplished in warfare against the shams of a materialistic age, and in championship of such almost lost causes as those of freedom, romance, and idealism!

And if even these gifted and sincere men could yield to the temptation of debasing the coinage of thought, what could be expected from the innumerable lesser guides to whom a half-literate public looked for its enlightenment? Would not the inevit-

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able result be, kill the faculty of reflection and substitute responsiveness to stimulus? The blind led by the blind may conceivably stumble clear of disaster, but a mob, obedient to the mass suggestion of those whose interest is to exploit its passions commercially, must inevitably head for disaster, because the most profitable of all passions to exploit are those that tend to universal suicide.

CHAPTER V

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There is a reply that is often and plausibly made to those who view the drama of modern life in the light of a tragedy, consisting in the failure of modern Man to adapt his nature to an environment he himself has revolutionized. "Look," we are told, "at the advance that has been made not only in material comfort, but in kindness, in philanthropy, in fellow feeling. Think what it was like in that polished eighteenth century, when women were flogged in public and an accused man could still be pressed to death for refusing to plead. Think of the horrors of the early factory system, of the devilry involved in the employment of child chimney-sweeps, of the cock-pits and bull-rings that flourished well on into the nineteenth century. Come nearer to our own time, and consider the coarseness, the brutality, that underlay the smooth surface of Victorian respectability. Think even of the picture of school life drawn by Mr. Kipling in his *Stalky and Co.*, when children were scientifically tortured till they fainted from the agony of it. Think of what a slum was like before the least attempt was made at State regulation, of the prisons in the days of the crank and treadmill, of the workhouses under a regime of naked Bumbledom. Think of what is implied in the fact that even in Horatia Ewing's books, it was still evidently a favourite boyish amusement to drive dogs mad with fright by tying tin kettles to their tails. And admit that there was a sweeter, kindlier spirit abroad at the beginning of the twentieth century, than at any time in those which had preceded it."

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All this is fairly put, and worth saying, but it is not the whole truth nor even the most important part of it. Let us give the modern age, in general, and compulsory education, in particular, the credit for a substantial measure of de-brutalization. But even here we must remember that signs of progress can be deceptive, and that progress itself is apt to be disappointingly patchy. Mr. Shaw, indeed, writing in 1903¹ goes so far as practically to deny that there has been any real progress in modern civilization at all. One suspects this of being a *tour de force* of Shavian rhetoric, but certainly some telling points are scored—one horrible incident in the South African War when the relatives and friends of a prisoner² were forced to witness his execution “hardly”, as Mr. Shaw puts it, “leaves us a right to plume ourselves on our superiority to Edward III at the surrender at Calais.” And the future held Denshawai and Amritsar and the Black and Tans.

But grant that there was perceptible progress towards the softening and humanizing of life—this change, being mainly emotional, and having no fixed basis of principle, was subject to inevitable limitations. It was seldom strong enough to prevail when self-interest was enlisted at all strongly on the other side. Thus great and genuine philanthropists like John Bright had discovered conscientious objections when it had been a question of humanizing conditions in their own factories. And progress in the restriction of cruelty to animals had been brought up short against the opposition of the nobility and gentry, who would not tolerate any form of humanity that threatened to curtail their sport, and prudently refrained from opposing such plebeian abominations as the public coursing of hares, because it was felt

¹ *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, Chap. VIII.

² I think Commandant Lotter, one of the Cape Dutch in arms on the Dutch side, and therefore a traitor.

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that if the mob had its simple cruelties curtailed, it might well retaliate in kind. And yet the encouraging of fierce dogs to fight a not unwilling bull had been less inhuman than a successful day with the beagles or otter hounds.

Positive selfishness was inextricably mixed with a negative factor, lack of imagination. Out of sight was out of sympathy. The facts of poverty were not known or not realized by the more prosperous section of the community. The kindly squire who was always ready to relieve a case of distress on his estate was unmoved by the reality of under-feeding in Canning Town or of over-crowding in Glasgow tenements, and did not want these unpleasant facts thrust under his nose. The suburban householder, who was hard enough put to it to keep up necessary appearances on an exiguous salary, did not care to be told of the even greater difficulties involved in existing at all on something like a pound a week. Consequently the member of the possessing classes—even if his possessions were small—was readily amenable to any suggestion that those who claimed a priority of public attention for the condition of the “have-nots”, and thought any increase of rates or taxes a lesser evil than its continuance, were corrupt, unpatriotic and intolerable agitators. And as he was ready to pay for what most tended to his peace of mind, it was obviously for the advantage of those who supplied him with printed matter to ply him with such suggestions. And, conversely, when journalism began to fish for the coppers of the “have-nots”, it became equally profitable to draw a picture of society in which the “haves” were heartless and vicious robbers:

For us unemployment, for them mad enjoyment.

Finally, and most important of all, the intensive cult of national egotism, that had already, on the Continent, come to prevail absolutely, and even in

England was fast superseding the old Liberal idealism, had the effect of limiting sympathy by frontiers. It was not patriotic to evince any concern over the sufferings of those who were either openly or potentially enemies, or to arrive at any conclusion, on grounds of humanity or justice, that could be regarded as besmirching the honour of the flag, the army, or the nation. No sympathy was allowable that tended in any way to prejudice national interests—even when these could be reckoned in terms of *£ s. d.*—still less to weaken the national will to unlimited victory once a combat had been joined. When Mr. Birrell had talked about hecatombs of slaughtered babes in the South African concentration camps, his offence against patriotism had been judged, if anything, more obnoxious, from the fact that the babes had actually perished not in hundreds, but in thousands—a statistical point that ill-wishers abroad would not fail to drive home. Patriotism, of a rather different type, might take comfort from the fact that England was about the one country any one of whose prominent politicians would have dared pass such criticism on his own nation in arms.

When we say, therefore, that the early twentieth century was a time when a void of religious faith was to some extent filled by a growth of humanitarian sentiment, we must add that such growth is subject to strict limits imposed by :

- (1) Lack of knowledge and imagination.
- (2) The countervailing impulse of egotism, which is strongest of all when it is shared in common by a class or people.

Bearing this in mind, we can say that the nearest approach to a national religion did not consist in formal Christianity, in any of its versions, but in something that eluded definition, a consensus not of faith, but of feeling. Was it the religion of all sensible men, a phrase that has been fathered on at least four

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celebrities but can hardly have originated very far off the eighteenth century? Not exactly—the cult of sense without sensibility was as dead as Jane Austen. We should rather be inclined to define it, if defined it must be, as the religion of all good fellows.

A phrase rife in the new journalism was “the human interest.” This, in its highest form, might have been identified with Shakespeare’s “milk of human kindness.” In this sense it may be said to be the inspiration of that man of letters who seems most of all representative of this time, John Galsworthy. Galsworthy surveys the social system of his own time, and that immediately preceding it, with a gentle penetrating sympathy that seems resigned to its own helplessness. He has none of Thomas Hardy’s high stoicism in the face of destiny, none of Mr. Wells’s bustling desire to get something done, no Shavian patent medicine of equalized incomes. He is sorry, as a sympathetic observer may be sorry, who can blame no one because he understands everything too deeply. One feels that if Mr. Galsworthy had lived in the time of the New Testament, he would never have taken a whip of small cords to a hard-worked dove-seller, with probably a wife and family to maintain—he would far more probably have given the poor fellow a good price for his wares, and then have opened all his cage doors. There is one story of his of a pathos almost intolerable, about a puppy turned adrift upon the cruelty of people who are not cruel, but only frightened and wrong-headed. Poor puppy! And poor, poor people gone wrong! That is what one feels about Galsworthy’s wasters and thieves and prostitutes—even about his bullies and Pharisees.

There is a curious ineffectiveness about Galsworthy’s creations that makes his work more than ever representative of the time. Life, as he visualizes it, does not reply to environment. His characters drift; they are whirled helplessly along the rapids of their destiny

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with the waterfall booming in earshot. The best of them can do no more than go down with colours flying. But not even the best of them can be a hero in the true sense of commanding his fate.

A kindred spirit is that of Mr. John Masefield, who leapt into fame by accomplishing the feat, unique in Edwardian literature, of writing long narrative poems that read as easily and as interestingly as novels. Mr. Masefield is pre-eminently a poet and dramatist of the human interest. His compassionate sympathy with all mankind is as great as that of Galsworthy. But like his, it is a curiously ineffective sympathy, and this despite Mr. Masefield's love of the open air and passion for the sea, despite the violence and brutality in which his muse not infrequently luxuriates. The best that Man can do is, like Pompey, to stand fast for his principles and be crushed; like Dauber, to find his manhood for a few strenuous weeks on a Cape Horn sailing ship, before he lies, smashed and breathing out his last on the deck; like Jesus, to allow himself to be crushed for the truth that is in him, a Jesus whom Mr. Masefield somehow contrives to make a pathetic rather than a divine figure. Mr. Masefield's advice, and what seems to be, for him, the conclusion of the whole matter:

Best trust the happy moments. What they gave
Makes man less fearful of the certain grave,
And gives his work compassion and new eyes. . . .

is but a more strenuous and distinctively Western rendering of Omar-Fitzgerald's

Ah, make the most of what we have to spend
Before we, too, into the dust descend,
Dust unto dust and under dust to lie. . . .

A love of humanity, then, charity without faith or hope, save of the most shadowy, is the essence of this religion, or substitute for religion. It was, of course, by no means original. It was now more than half a

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century since Auguste Comte had tried to get rid of all theology and metaphysics, and substitute a formal cult of humanity, but this had never taken a hold on the popular imagination, in spite of a small and earnest Positivist sect, including that evergreen Victorian, Frederic Harrison. Mrs. Humphry Ward, with her attempt to put Christianity on its legs by equating it with philanthropy, may be accounted a prophetess of the new humanism. But it was only with the passing of the Victorian age that it became an effective influence, a safe motive for a best seller. The two great sentimental novelists of the time, Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, were in the forefront of the movement. Marie Corelli even created an interesting youth who in some vague way reincarnates Christ, and in that capacity gives poor old Leo XIII, who duly shrinks into the semblance of a mummy, a thorough dressing down about neglecting the poor at his gates. That the same gold mine was workable after the War was triumphantly demonstrated by Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson.

It made little difference to the new humanism whether or not it denied Christianity altogether or merely brought it up to date, by adopting a Bowdlerized version of Christ Philanthropist. That silver-tongued preacher, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, drew packed congregations Sunday after Sunday to listen to his exposition of the New Theology at the City Temple, though the newness of the theology mainly consisted in the absence of any theology at all, and a compensating abundance of emotional uplift tinged with Socialism.

Journalism, of course, exploited the human interest for all it was worth. The plain, blunt journalist who loved his neighbour was in marked favour with editors. Social problems, treated in the human way, were excellent copy. The man who exploited the human touch to the greatest advantage was among

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the most remarkable, though not the most fortunate, magnates of the new journalism. This was Mr. Horatio Bottomley, who, in 1906, started *John Bull* as a penny rival to Mr. Labouchere's *Truth*. The success of this new weekly was due in no small degree to the personality with which the editor succeeded in confronting his public. He stood forth as a man of no dogmas and no inhibitions, a jolly, downright Englishman with a hatred of cant and humbug and a heart—as the saying is—as big as a whale.

John Bull was the Penny Truth, and truth-lover was its English editor. If you saw a thing stated *there*, you felt that it was so. *Cœr ad cœr loquitur*. The penny magazine public felt that it could not only trust but love Mr. Bottomley. His constituency of Central Hackney was one of the most unassailable in England. He could be accepted, like Bolingbroke, as guide, philosopher and friend, for he was fully capable of applying the human touch to most of the difficulties of human life. Also like Bolingbroke, he dreamed of heading a patriot, or, as he phrased it, a business government, that should stop the prating of the politicians and get things done honestly and competently at last. To many, this seemed an obviously good idea, and such a hold had it taken, that in the darkest days of the Great War, Mr. Bottomley was seriously talked of as the destined saviour of his country.

It is important to note the date of Mr. Bottomley's advent as high priest of the new humanism, for his genius, like that of other more permanently successful press bosses, consisted in his realization of the precise sentiment it paid to exploit at the particular moment. In the eighties the pioneers of the new journalism were still Victorians in spirit—Newnes, with his self-conscious respectability of the petty bourgeois and his *flair* for snippets of information; Stead, with his Puritan zeal broadening into Liberalism. The Harms-

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worths, though they started in the footsteps of Newnes, built up their distinctive fame by exploiting the spirit of the nineties, their love of everything big, their cult of the broken record, their patriotism that bursts its lungs. The next arrival, Mr. Pearson, soon became identified with the business version of Imperialism associated with the last phase of Mr. Chamberlain's career, a cause which Alfred Harmsworth, who was too great a journalist not to adapt his enthusiasm to his decade, executed a complete *volte face* in order to embrace. Finally Mr. Bottomley, who arrived in 1906, perceived that the moment had come for the exploitation of a human sentiment ostentatiously dissociated from any sort of formal belief or inhibition, and resulting in a sort of jolly-good-fellowship all round.

That such good-fellowship might be sufficiently elastic to permit the weekly trouncing, without ruth or measure, of foreigners, Puritans, and all sorts and conditions of selected human cock-shies, is by no means to the point. The perfect journalist has a tact that rises superior to the intransigence of logicians. It is the advantage of sentiment without dogma, that you are never brought up against some unyielding snag of principle. And before we tax the High Priest of the new humanism with inconsistency, let us remember that the very word implies the existence of something fixed and definite to which you can be consistent. You can take your stand on a principle, or a dogma, but hardly on a sentiment.

We may seem to have travelled a considerable distance from the humanity of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Masfield to that of Mr. Bottomley. But each nature reacts to the spirit of the time in its own way, and the point I am trying to establish is that, in the years before the War, there was abroad a sentiment of human kindness and good fellowship that served to some extent as a substitute for religion.

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Scarcely, however, as an effective substitute. Even in its highest manifestations, this mere sentiment had none of the drive or definiteness of a genuine religion. It remained powerless either to inspire a comprehensive remedy for social conditions that everybody agreed in deploring, or to mitigate the egomania that was driving the nations to suicide. There was not present the will to implement it, or the faith of which that will is born. It was not to men of good feeling that peace on earth was proclaimed.

CHAPTER VI

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

There is, among the pre-War cartoons of Mr. Max Beerbohm, one, in 1913, depicting the reactions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the "Progress, or whatever it is" of the twentieth. The new century is seen sprinting furiously in overalls and goggles, panting and sweating, towards some unseen destination. Except for the aviation kit, that cartoon would have hit off the situation before King Edward's brief reign had run half its course. In whatever direction things were moving, there was no doubt about the speed, which was constantly accelerating. It was surprising in how short a time even the consciously up-to-date nineties had become so out-moded as to seem almost prehistoric. The *Yellow Book* was already fetching a good price as an historical curiosity. With the exception of Max himself, who, as he seemed never to have been young, proved likewise incapable of ageing, the brilliant band that had aspired to make all things new was dead or in process of being forgotten. Lionel Johnson was hardly even a name; swift oblivion had engulfed Harland and Cracken-thorpe; Stephen Phillips, who had been proclaimed as the elder Dumas speaking with the voice of Milton, fell so completely out of fashion that his pen was no longer able to keep him from the verge of starvation; John Davidson, who had declined from poet to prophet, found himself a voice crying incoherent Sadism in a godless wilderness, and put an end to his own life—bequeathing, as epilogue to his last testament, a lyric of poignant beauty, that to this day has escaped recognition.

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The remoteness of the nineties is emphasized by the fact that quite early in the century some of their leading figures began to be discovered and revived. Not only the fame but the very name of Wilde had been under eclipse—he was not the sort of person you would mention in the drawing-room. And then, in 1905, appeared as much of his self-communings in jail as a judicious editor thought fit to give to the world. The saintly attitude, as of a modern San Sebastian, and the haunting cadences of the prose, produced a violent reaction among a public that had forgotten the fierce passions aroused by the trial. Wilde's works, long out of print, fetched fancy prices, and a magnificent collected edition was presently put on the market. Among the undergraduate intelligentsia, there was a brief and vivid revival of decadence, that bore fruit, long after the scarlet sins and the absinthe had been returned to limbo, in a pose of humorous perversity. Other revivals followed—the Bodley Head disinterred Dowson, whose fame came to repose upon one poem—and with what unction did Youth call for madder music and stronger wine, or reel off the luscious Alexandrine,

Nightlong within my arms in love and sleep she lay.

Francis Thompson, too, achieved a greater fame in his resurrection than ever during his lifetime. And the Bodley Head, true to its once discarded allegiance, completed in 1901 a magnificent collected edition of Aubrey Beardsley.

The charm about rediscovering these worthies of the *fin de siècle* lay precisely in the fact that the times had moved on so fast and so far that they had already something of the fascination of antiques. It was the same with that other phase of the *fin de siècle*, its Diamond Jubilee brand of Imperialism. The sheer power of Mr. Kipling's writing would always command sales, but he was no longer the dominating

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influence he had been before the South African disillusionment. It was, in fact, rather the fashion among the new generation to affect a lofty scorn for Mr. Kipling—to nickname him a banjo poet, on the hardly sufficient ground of his having devoted one lyric to that instrument, and having invented a lilting banjo metre for the purpose. Henley and his imperial young men of the *National Observer* were almost forgotten, except for one or two lyrics—notably the one about “my unconquerable soul”—in anthologies.

Imperialism was by no means dead—even its eclipse was only temporary—but it had become at once less noisy and less unsophisticated than in the glad confident dawn of the Jubilees. It was no longer the flag of England and the White Man’s Burden, so much as Mr. Chamberlain’s ideal of the Empire on a Business Footing. It is perhaps not exactly true to maintain that you cannot write poetry about tariffs, because Mr. Kipling accomplished this very feat—but how many even of his admirers remember *Joseph’s Dream*? And that other ideal of a Free Commonwealth of Nations, that was destined to make the very term Empire a sentimental anachronism, had not yet found its bard. How, indeed, could such a one have been expected to arise, in an age of collective egotism whose touch with sanity consisted in a consciously unsentimental calculation of what patriotism would fetch? At least it can be said of King Edward’s age that it had too much good taste to blossom out, like that of his ancestor, the First George, into lyric raptures about commerce. Or perhaps it was that poetry was not accounted enough of an imperial asset to make it worth paying for.

There is nothing in the Edwardian Age to capture our imagination like the decadence and the Imperialism of the *fin de siècle*. The only thing certain was the utter discredit of all that the Victorians had held sacred. Not only had the old faiths been put out of date,

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but faith itself had become a drug on the intellectual market, except in so far as it was capable of harnessing itself to economics, by setting its affections frankly upon the things of this earth, and adopting standards of material value.

Two instances may help to show what was the spirit of the youthful intelligentsia during these early years of the century. I trust it will not be debited wholly to academic patriotism if I refer to King's College, at Cambridge, in the time of the Carbonari and Rupert Brooke, as an intellectual forcing house not less successful in its way than Balliol during the mastership of Jowett. An extraordinary proportion of the men of that time have risen to distinction in various fields. There was, however, nobody among the dons with an influence comparable to that of Jowett, though Lowes Dickinson's rooms provided a *salon* for the exchange of advanced and God-quelling epigram. Youth was no longer content to let crabbed age have the moulding of its opinions.

The very name by which these young men chose to designate their clique was symptomatic of their attitude. The original Carbonari had been banded together for revolution. So were these of a later day, with gowns instead of cloaks and ideas for weapons, but they differed from the old Charcoal-burners in one rather more important respect, for to them Revolution was an end in itself, like Heresy to another society of advanced Cambridge men. They certainly flirted a little with Socialism, but they lacked the holy and uncritical ardour with which Victorian youth had flown to embrace its ideals. They had too much vital energy to be genuinely bored—boredom and Rupert Brooke could never have dwelt together—but a blasé superiority to enthusiasm was the pose they affected, and their red was not the plebeian bloody of flags and ties, but some rare nuance of *sang de bœuf* or *rose Dubarry* that marked off its possessor from the swinish

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multitude. Their Socialism, like Mr. Chesterton's orthodoxy, always had the piquancy of a paradox.

What they were thoroughly sure about was the necessity, in Nietzsche's phrase, of breaking the old tables. To be advanced was to shock somebody's prejudices—no very easy task in the atmosphere of consciously advanced Liberalism that emanated from the High Table. At last, however, something like success crowned their efforts. It was on the occasion of the Society's annual dinner, and one bold Bacchanal hit upon the idea of altering the word "bless" in the Royal Toast to its precise opposite.¹ But the success was significantly meagre. If such an insult had been breathed of the old Queen, in her latter years, the best that could have happened to those connected with it would have been to have secured their expulsion from the college authorities before their fellow-undergraduates had had time to execute sentence of High Treason under Lynch Law. But though there was undoubtedly a good deal of wrathful protest, no consequences worth speaking of ensued. The dons, though fully apprised of what had occurred, shrugged official shoulders and refused to be drawn. As for the undergraduates, dire things were certainly promised for the night of the approaching bump supper, but whether it was that the college boats had sustained an abnormal number of contusions in the hinder parts, or that the tolerance of Edwardian King's was shock-proof and treason-proof, the most that happened was the forcing of an empty room, and the destruction of three copies of the *New Age*. And in this the college may be accounted, in its new generation, wise. "The must," as Mephistopheles puts it, "may foam absurdly in the barrel, but at the last it turns to wine," and the guilt of Gallio is dearly avoided at the risk of casting out a Shelley.

¹ Not more than two or three, who did not include Rupert Brooke, appear to have responded.

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Such was the fashion in which the pick of the youthful intelligentsia was knocking on the oaks of Cambridge staircases, but another, and not less significant field of its activities, was the London School of Economics, the new branch of London University formed to deal with those sociological problems that were absorbing more and more attention in the new age. The School was then in its first period of youthful enthusiasm, and had not taken on the rather institutional and impersonal aspect of post-War years. Here there was no lack of enthusiasm, even in pose. The experience of one new arrival, who was promptly asked by the first lady he met in the Common Room, first, whether he desired to reform Society, and secondly, what he thought of the Great Realities, was by no means unique. For here men and women students rubbed shoulders on terms of comradely equality, and with a solemn determination never for a moment to allow the least suggestion of romance to mar the austerity of that comradeship.

The first two Directors of the School, appointed, as they had been, under Unionist auspices, were among the economic heads of the Tariff Reform movement, but the Director was a remote and shadowy figure who counted for little in the life of the students. The dominating influence, amounting almost to a spiritual dictatorship, was that of those two great leaders of the middle-class revolt against itself, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb; there were few students who would not have deemed it an honour to be assigned the humblest part in those voluminous researches by which the reform of Society would, it was hoped, be expedited. For with all their enthusiasm, the ambitions of these young people were confined within the narrowest limits of specialism. To select or be assigned some hole or corner of the social field, and to work it up, after months and years of sedulous spade-work, into a sound but stodgy little thesis, was

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all ye did in sociology and all ye needed to do. It was to such as took up this burden that it would be granted to partake of occasional coffee in the Vatican on the Thames Embankment.

It must be remembered that the School exacted from its entrants not even that smattering of Liberal culture that is imposed on every candidate for a degree at Oxford and Cambridge. It was for the sole purpose of receiving a sociological training that they entered its doors. Add to this that so many of them were women with the woman student's immense and docile capacity for uncritical labour. They were, for the most part, without any defensive armour against authority—the impish iconoclasm of the Carbonari was not for them. It is true that they were strenuously and consciously advanced, but to be advanced was no more than to accept in blind faith the prescribed gospel of the moment. Not even the Professors, and hardly even the Webbs, commanded such blind devotion as Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose lightest utterances were quoted as the field preacher quotes his Bible, even when he came down to the School for the specific purpose of denouncing reverence.

And yet it was an atmosphere tingling with vitality. That serious and rather humourless enthusiasm of a generation back did succeed in producing a rich harvest of character. It was not all comedy, for tension without balance is more dangerous to some minds than wine to an empty stomach. But comedy, there was, in the true Meredithian sense, lovable and very human, and there may well be survivors of those days who would gladly exchange their post-War disillusionment for the giant-killing optimism of a sociological fairyland, wherein the reform of Society was still a comparatively straightforward task.

I have selected these two representative specimens of what may be described as the vanguard of Edwardian youth. But we must not forget that the

great youthful majority remained then, as now, obstinately lowbrow. The average undergraduate thought of his college boat and—not quite so enthusiastically—of impending examinations; the young fellow in Ealing or Maida Vale went to his job in the City and thought more of Marie Lloyd and the latest musical comedy than of Mr. Shaw; while as for the gilded youth about town, he had his sport, and his clothes, and his amours to occupy him, like his father and grandfather before him. But it is the leaven and not the lump that determines progress.

The title of a recent book recalls about as vividly as anything can the spirit of the time. It is called *Edwardian Hey-days*. Even though the foundations had now completely crumbled away, the magnificent superstructure erected by the Victorians stood as proudly as ever. What if there were fissures perceptible in the walls, what if certain subsidences were already to be detected—why invite trouble by meeting it half-way? To restore foundations, let alone reconstruct the whole building, was a difficult and expensive job at the best, and those who laughed at the old Victorian master builders had no particular constructive ideas of their own. The laughter died upon the wind, and the best intentions of the serious ended in uncreative goodwill or visionless specialism. The moment at least was certain. On, on with the dance! And if, low down on the Eastern horizon, black clouds were banking up, stabbed by occasional flashes of lightning—draw the curtains fast, and turn on a blaze of artificial lights! And if somewhere in the cellarage, nervous folk persuaded themselves that they could hear noises—then strike up fresh music, and let the light-hearted *abandon* of the Viennese Waltz be drowned in the tom-tom pulse beat of the jungle!

CHAPTER VII

EDWARDIAN ENVIRONMENT

If it was the way of the Edwardians to make the best of the moment, it can at least be said of them that they made it a fruitful best. In not only one, but every branch of creative art, work was being accomplished of the first, or all but the first, rank. Nor was it only a matter of a few exceptional geniuses. At long last there was a definite improvement in the standard of everyday taste. To those of us who cannot weep with the angels, it is a dire temptation to poke fun at the successive outrages perpetrated by the Victorians, culminating in the orgy of vulgarity that was the real naughtiness of the nineties. The new age had its faults—they were grave and vital—but it did at least contrive to preserve a veneer of æsthetic decency. Quite early in the century the bamboo-ware and Japanese gimcrackery were either put out of the way, or fell to pieces of their own accord; patchwork coverings vanished from sofa backs, and mirrors were stripped unashamedly naked of their decent drapery; the novelties that had jostled one another in the drawing-room were condemned to be broken up in the nursery; the photogravures of Scotch cattle were found to have slumped surprisingly in value when occasion arose to realize them.

Furniture was at last beginning to receive the impress of a spirit definitely modern. In 1900, at the Paris Exposition, was seen the triumph of what had for some time on the Continent been known as *l'art nouveau*. This style might at first sight have been taken as embodying, in an exaggerated form, the

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worst faults of the nineties. It was out to call attention to itself by ostentatious eccentricity. It outdid the wildest extravagances of the Rococo. Symmetry it abhorred; it was at war with repose. It sought as far as possible to abolish the straight line and rectangular surface, and to riot in curves of ever more bewildering luxuriance. And yet as interpreted by the one or two firms that first brought it into vogue, the new style was capable of producing some pleasing effects. This was only achieved by making every piece a separate work of art, a thing that could obviously no longer be expected once the new art had become standardized by mass production.

The style spread to England, but there it was modified by the dislike that almost every Englishman has of pushing a new idea to its logical extreme. William Morris had founded a tradition of constructional soundness that was proof against the dominance even of Parisian fashion. Accordingly the New Art in England never ran to the extravagance of its French original, and acted mainly as a quickening and refining influence on interior decoration. As in the time of Hepplewhite and Sheraton, English craftsmanship succeeded in taking to itself just as much of the new spirit as it could conveniently assimilate without breaking its essential continuity.

In so far, that is to say, as we can talk of craftsmanship at all. For now the problem of beautifying life was complicated by the very nature of machine-made civilization. No sooner did any new creative idea make its influence felt, than it was seized upon and standardized for mass production. The New Art owed whatever charm it possessed to its individuality, and did not lend itself to standardization.

It is therefore extremely to the credit of one or two prominent establishments, notably Liberty's and Heal's, that in spite of all temptations to make themselves cheap, they made of their business an art, a

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living art that strove to give outward and visible form to the spirit of its own age, and not merely to resurrect the forms of a dead past. For this was the besetting sin even of those who plumed themselves on their good taste in the early days of the century. The more the art of the past was studied and understood the greater became the tendency to let it smother that of the present. The vice of copying to style had never been so rampant, and the names of Bourbons and Tudors were shamelessly associated with the environment of the new rich. For people who were not rich at all, but merely genteel, an immense amount of shoddy was machined and assembled, in designs of warranted good taste, and bearing about as much likeness to the real thing as a two-shilling doll to a baby. As for most of the furniture supplied to the poor, cheapness and not beauty was still the quality aimed at, and ornamentation was tawdry, though there were surprising exceptions, such as the painted buckets of the canal barge community.

But in the upper class, and to a certain extent the middle, the improvement in taste was undeniable. The *fin de siècle* mania for overcrowding was at last beginning to pass away, and mistresses devoted themselves with a new-found zest for making their surroundings not merely pretentious but beautiful. The new appreciation of the past, if it led to the aping of styles, had at least the compensating advantage that it made people appreciate their heritage of predeceased craftsmanship. While the gimcracks and novelties went to the scrap-heap, pieces of valuable old furniture were rescued from attics and lumber-rooms, and the appreciation of these old things led to a demand for the same virtues of craftsmanship in the new. The mere fact that it was possible for one or two firms to make good taste a paying proposition is eloquent of the advance on Victorian standards.

The luxurious demands of the new century were

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reflected by a comfort in daily life such as no previous age had known. Among the proud aristocrats of the eighteenth century splendour and not ease had been the crown of existence. But to the twentieth-century plutocrat, money was the means of procuring the best time possible. In their heart of hearts, the Edwardians were not too sure of the future, but the present none could take from them, and they meant to make the most of it. The arm-chair became a day bed in which to sink and snore ; the bed itself was a delicate contrivance of springs, with perhaps a telephone in reach, and an electric fire near by that could rob the coldest morning of its terrors ; the bathroom was an Aladdin's cave, in which the waters were fragrant with salts, the towels were warmed on hot rails, and showers descended at command. But these were the commonplace adjuncts of moderately rich houses—to the very rich there were far superior satisfactions. One great captain of finance, Whittaker Wright, had so thriven by the promotion of companies that he was able to acquire an estate in Surrey, where, says *The Dictionary of National Biography*, "he surrounded himself with extravagant luxuries, erecting a well-equipped observatory and a private theatre . . . Hills which obstructed views were levelled, and armies of labourers employed to fill up old lakes and dig new ones." But the greatest of all these marvels was the billiard-room, which was made of glass, underneath an artificial lake. When, in due course, the owner of this Paradise was invited to change his residence for one of His Majesty's jails, his wealth did not desert him, for it proved capable of furnishing him with a timely euthanasia.

This new increase in luxury was no monopoly of the plutocrat. It spread far down and its influence was not unfelt even among the lower ranks of society. It was easier for mass production to turn out comfortable or showy than beautiful things, and it was only

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to be expected that as long as the machinery of international exchange continued to function, and the machines to produce for utility and not for destruction, a certain proportion of the benefits would be harvested by those who actually made the wheels go round. Not only was the standard of housing constantly improving, but the new big stores, and the synthetic materials in which they dealt, were making it an easier matter to achieve some sort of standardized smartness—already before the War the proportion of those who appeared on the cricket field unflannelled was diminishing towards vanishing-point, while indignant dowagers were gasping over the airs given themselves by the rising generation of domestics. It was easier, now, to convert the cottage parlour into a colourable sitting-room, with cheap new or second-hand furniture.

The pre-War time was one of strenuous building activity. A new generation of architects had arisen who were no longer bound by the merely imitative traditions of the Victorians. Even though the Christian faith was notoriously losing ground, King Edward was able to lay the foundation-stone, in 1904, of a Cathedral, overlooking the Mersey, that was the first of such buildings to signify anything whatever since the reconstruction of St. Paul's. The architect was a grandson and namesake of the famous Sir Gilbert Scott, the Panjandrum of Victorian Gothic, the man who had restored as much soul as he could out of nearly every cathedral in England, and showed how Gothic could be run up with absolute correctness of form, but no soul at all. The grandson's new cathedral was Gothic in principle—but with what a difference! The form was correct to no style of a past age, but expressed with majestic directness all—and perhaps more than all—that the master builder intended the stone to say. When—if the faith and resources of Liverpool ever permit—the scheme is

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carried to completion, it may yet be possible for the twentieth century to look the fourteenth in the face. Even the torso of the Cathedral is at present fit to justify the original application of that murdered adjective "awful".

But except for this outstanding achievement, it was not in church-building that the spirit of the age found its natural expression. The amount of money that was being made and spent called for an unprecedented activity of country-house building. This was not the sort of demand that had emanated from the all-powerful magnates of the eighteenth century, to whom an estate had been a little kingdom with the mansion as palace. Stateliness was no longer the overmastering motive. Many of these new rich did not want to be tied to the business of a glorified farmer. What they did want was a good time, to the utmost limit of their resources. And to do them justice, many of them aspired to homes which, besides being luxurious, should be also homely in the best sense, and emanate a sense of refined but informal well-being. It was in meeting this demand that the extraordinarily versatile genius of Mr. (as he then was) Edwin Lutyens found its happiest expression. The house with him was robbed of all the pretentious formality of the Victorian convention, and became the centre of a little paradise on earth with which it was as intimately connected as the head with the limbs. There is something of the spirit of *l'art nouveau* about his work. Buildings become plastic to his moulding and express themselves, when required, by the subtlest of curvature. To appreciate the wizardry of the Lutyens touch, one must study one of his houses—and the smaller and less formal the better—from several points of view. The observer will be astonished to find, as he strolls round, that the house presents itself to him in four or five separate and distinct aspects, each complete in itself, as if it

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were from that angle alone that the building was meant to be regarded, and each adapted with the most sensitive forethought to its visible environment. Only second to Mr. Lutyens was his future colleague in the creation of the New Delhi, Mr. Herbert Baker, who had, like Joseph Chamberlain, been able to broaden his vision by contact with the illimitable veldt, and had had his first great opportunity when Cecil Rhodes had employed him to design his millionaire's residence at Cape Town.

It was a many-sided architecture that flourished in the early twentieth century. It was capable of expressing civic pride by the erection of such noble public buildings as those of Cardiff, and, what was even more important, it was linked to schemes of scientific town-planning. A new type of Garden City made its appearance, though unfortunately it was too late to make any noticeable impression upon such accomplished outrages against health and beauty as Sheffield, for instance, and Salford.

The most significant art of an age is not necessarily that which is best from the standpoint of pure æsthetics. The Edwardian Age was one of feverish commercial activity, and that of a distinctively modern kind. Not only were the vendors of goods forced to advertise intensively for customers, but the advertiser of the new school did not aim at catering for an existing demand so much as at creating the demand for which he aspired to cater. He would go out into the streets; he would penetrate into the homes of those with money to spend, and compel them to buy. The shops, and still more, the great department stores that were threatening to supersede them, came to regard their very architecture in the light of advertisement. The merit of a building was in exact proportion to its success in attracting customers. And of course the architect was expected to minister to this need, and to regard himself as an advertiser in building material.

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Accordingly a new style of commercial architecture came into vogue, whose principle was to sacrifice everything to creating an immediate effect, in order that the building might shout at the passer-by and blow its own trumpet louder than those of its neighbours. Every part that was not intended for this purpose would be as squalid as the rest was showy, craving no other merit than that of the maximum cheapness consistent with stability.

It was in this spirit that the citizens of London allowed the otherwise wanton destruction of what was, by universal consent, one of the world's fairest thoroughfares, the Regent Street of Nash. Here at any rate there was no nonsense about town planning—every building, as it elbowed its way into the picture, might do its damndest to attract attention, and the general effect could be left to chance. The genteel dignity of the Quadrant was shattered at a stroke by the irruption of a giant hotel, as gaudily overdressed as the cosmopolitans that big hotels seek to attract. "Eat, drink and be merry," it shouted, "so long as your money lasts, for that is all that life has got to give!" A few years later, a new era in London hotel building was inaugurated by the Ritz, overlooking the Green Park. Here the principles of steel frame construction were applied with a candour that would have been inconceivable in Victorian times. Here was plutocracy true to itself and without the least desire to pose in the trappings of the old aristocratic splendour. It was impersonal in the way that capital is impersonal. You were invited to turn so much wealth into its equivalent of luxury, and the thing would be done with all the well-oiled efficiency of modern finance. Whether you wanted to launch your daughter on the marriage market by a coming-out ball, or to honour your Saviour's nativity by a feast of friends, or to enjoy without effort or forethought the highest standard of conventional luxury

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that the age had to offer, you had only to write your name on a cheque, and the thing would happen. And then when you left, or when the company in which you had embarked your savings went smash, another would take your number, and not only your existence, but the very consciousness of your having existed as a luxury-drawing unit would be obliterated. Steel-framed walls have no memories, and the new architecture that the Ritz foreshadowed, with its rectangular surfaces, and windows ranked like tombstones in a war cemetery, is one that deliberately aims at standardizing the individual, as machine parts, or tissue cells, are standardized. And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

But the Ritz was sincere as few Victorian buildings had dared to be, though it was far from having attained the austere impersonality of the great blocks of post-War flats that are the latest development of this tendency. If it was an advertisement, it was at least an honest and dignified statement of what it had to offer. Not dissimilar in spirit were some of the great blocks of workmen's dwellings that were being run up—some of them under the auspices of the London County Council—a measureless improvement on the dreadful products of Victorian industrial anarchy, but more of barracks for Robots than homes for men. The difference between the millionaire's and the workman's barrack was mainly one of the model on which they tended to standardize their inmates.

As for the great shops and department stores, their appeal was to a more impressionable and far larger prospective clientele than that of the hotels. Naturally they aimed at striking the passer-by with an impression of opulence. The premises of Messrs. Waring & Gillow in Oxford Street are an excellent example of the Edwardian commercial style, with their flamboyant ornamentation, and the care-free

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gaiety of their invitation to a public of jingling pockets :

Full and faire ones, come and buy !

More profoundly symbolic are the premises of Messrs. Selfridge, a little higher up the old road to Tyburn. Here there is an imposing order of Ionic columns, that might at first glance seem the resurrected colonnade flanking some great altar of the Silver Age. But if you behold it from the other side of the street, it will seem as if this noble and sacred edifice were imposing its tremendous weight upon a foundation of glass, and you feel half afraid to go across and inspect the pretty things that the glass is intended to reveal. You know, of course, that there is no real danger of your being ground to powder, but if you are of an imaginative turn of mind the momentary impression may chance to start you wondering whether you are looking at a shop, or a temple—or perhaps an epoch.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NINE AGAINST MAMMON

Commercial art is of no less historical importance than commercial architecture. The enlistment of the artist in the cause of mass suggestion is as old as the purchase of Millais's *Bubbles* by a soap company. Equally notorious was the similar appropriation of Harry Furniss's "I used your soap twenty years ago, since which I have used no other." But here the advertiser was content to come to the artist, after he had done his work for his own purposes, and buy what he found. But the new tendency was for the advertiser to employ the artist as he might an extra window dresser, and for art to pursue no longer its own æsthetic ends, but to measure its success by that of its employer.

So high were the rewards that commerce was able to offer, that it is not surprising to find artists even of the first rank enlisted in the service, and the poster exercising an unmistakable influence upon the picture. For poster design is an art in itself, with its own canons. Everything depends on the immediate effect—the advertisement has got to hit its victim in the eye, and it cannot waste time by announcing that it is going to begin. The advertiser has to do the whole of the work himself; he can expect no co-operation from the beholder. Such portraits as the *Mona Lisa*, or those of Rembrandt, on which you need to gaze long and lovingly in order to penetrate the depths of their meaning, would have been mere waste of hoarding space. On the other hand, one imagines that El Greco, with his effects that strike

from the other end of the room, would, if he could come back to earth and condescend to prostitute his genius, command enormous prices, with but little change of method, as a poster designer—a fact that perhaps accounts for his belated recognition in pre-War years.

The artist of any sort who hires himself out for commercial purposes is, in an even profounder sense than the woman who trades in her body, a prostitute. It does not in the least follow that the advertiser-artist may not be as useful as Rahab and as attractive as Nell Gwynne. But there is a convention, and perhaps more than a convention, against this oldest of all professions as a career for those who, like the mothers and makers, hold the future in their keeping. This convention is most persistent of all in literature. Mr. Wells has told us how Bennett, Mr. Shaw, and another, whose name we can guess, were offered an enormous fee by a great general store to write its advertisements—and with full liberty to praise or blame as they saw fit. "They declined the proposal," says Mr. Wells, "as an infringement of their priestly function"¹—remarkable words from one not usually suspected of sacerdotal tendencies. Another instance is that of an equally celebrated author, who, being asked to lend his authority to some patent medicine of the mind, replied simply that his pen was not for sale.² On the other hand, members of the theatrical profession, with a few honourable exceptions, made no bones about lying to order about the merits, and their own experience, of any face cream, dentifrice, or automobile, whose vendor liked to purchase their signature, and there were even beginning to be society ladies of equally accommodating morals. It is an amazing proof of the way in which mass suggestion had come to dominate the public, that this transparent

¹ *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, p. 312.

² Others were.

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humbug was everywhere swallowed, and that the talents thus expended returned with heavy interest in the form of sales.

Poster art was developing rapidly throughout the early twentieth century. It was no less useful to the politician than to the shopkeeper. At the London County Council election, in 1907, the Moderate Party, which had so far failed to achieve a majority, altered its name to the more catching title of Municipal Reform, and conducted a tearing campaign against what it christened the squandermania of the hitherto dominant Progressives, a campaign of which the most effective weapon was a hideous face, reinforced by a pointing forefinger, which bawled from every hoarding, "It's your money we want!" This motto, which, whether or not it was a fair statement of the Progressive aims, would have been the truth at last if it had been transferred to practically any other announcement on the hoarding, was magnificently successful in putting the wind up a largely middle-class electorate. A similar technique could turn people into nervous wrecks by suggestions of disease, or into sots by plying them with stimulus to drink. But it was not for such crude work that Pegasus was harnessed. The real advertising artist was more likely to be found composing landscapes of a startling simplicity, and at the same time of a highly sentimentalized attractiveness, or else in devising harmonies and contrasts of colour calculated to excite a favourable reaction towards the goods with which they were arbitrarily associated.

The repercussions of this activity on art itself were by no means bound to be wholly unfavourable. It was something that an artist—or a musician for that matter—should acquire the habit of cutting æsthetic cackle and getting straight to his point. And the connection with commerce could not fail to have a certain effect in making artistic statement direct and

vivid. In the exhibitions of that time, and even the Academy itself, the visitor could hardly fail to be struck by the resemblance of some of the most admired pictures, shimmering as they were with bright colours dabbed on in patches, to posters. But the art of the poster is also one of quick returns ; there is no depth beneath its surface, and it yields its whole secret to the first glance.

The impressionist style, which had originated in a desire to preserve the entire independence of art, thus turned out to be singularly well adapted to the ends of commerce. For commerce is a rich, cunning old rake who is never happier than in conquering an innate aversion. But impressionism was no longer, as it had been in the previous generation, the cause to which the young artists, whose work was most alive, pinned their faith. It is delightful to watch the shimmer of light on surfaces, or to catch some fleeting mood and fix it on canvas, but after a time one has longing for depth and solidity, and to exchange the fleeting for the essential. It is not that the new men wished to put back the clock to pre-impressionist ideals—impressionism had been tried and found wanting only in the sense that it had not gone far enough. Therefore the newest tendency in art was christened Post-impressionism, which may be interpreted as “all impressionism and something more.” It was born in France, that birthplace of new causes, and first obtained formal recognition from an English public at the epoch-making exhibition of 1911.

Here England was introduced for the first time to that mighty triumvirate of Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, as well as to the even more advanced and startling talent of Matisse. Here, it at once appeared, was something which impressionism had lacked. In Monet's landscape you had watched the hourly changing effects of light on pool or haystack, but Cezanne made you feel the mass and solidity of his Provençal

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hills; his very houses stood as four-square to the elements as the one in the parable that was built upon a rock. Whistler had imparted to drab buildings in a pea-soup fog the wonder and beauty of fairy palaces, but Van Gogh could take an old battered lodging-house chair, could set it before you in the full clarity of daylight—and lo, you would find yourself gazing on a thing of dignity and tragic pathos! What art has thus transfigured, let no man call common.

But this was only the beginning of the new movement. The point about Monet's haystack was that it was much more like a real haystack than any pre-impressionist picture could have been, and it might have been argued that Cezanne's houses and Van Gogh's chair were even more like the real thing. But these men had started a revolution with whose later developments they had no more in common than Liberal reformers with Bolsheviks. It would soon be enough to damn a picture for it to be recognizably like anything on earth, or for anyone but an initiate to be able to tell which way up it was meant to be looked at. A similar tendency was at work in sculpture, and indeed, to some extent, in all forms of artistic creation.

Obviously we have to deal with something of wider significance than a mere development of pictorial technique. The whole attitude of art towards civilization was changing fundamentally. We have two tendencies at work, and in conflict, both equally vital. The first is for machine-made civilization to capture and make a vulgar convenience of the Muse, the second is for the Muse to part company from civilization. And in this latter tendency there are again two phases to be distinguished. It had been enough for impressionists like Whistler to proclaim the absolute independence of art from everyday life, and to retire, like Walter Pater, into a cloistral seclusion from the Philistine world. But to the artists of the new move-

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ment, mere aloofness was not enough. Civilization was so much the enemy that it was necessary to wage sharp war against it. Accordingly we find the strangest developments, particularly in France, where ideas walk naked. We find one school of artists calling themselves *fauves*, or wild beasts, and another, rather later, dadaists, carrying unsophistication so far as to stammer and scrabble like infants. One of the post-impressionist triumvirate, Gauguin, shook the dust of Paris off his feet, and ended his life and career in the more congenial atmosphere of Tahiti, painting uncivilized life in a style of calculated harmony with his subject. The whole previous tendency of art to proceed from the crude to the refined was deliberately reversed; in a score of ways artists strove to adapt their methods to the demands of a primitive mentality. The very fact that a scientific age set such store by objective accuracy was enough to inspire a number of artists to cast out truth to fact or appearance as the deadliest of the Philistine virtues. From the Indian method of representing the same thing several times over to convey motion, the transition was easy to trying to combine several points of view in the same picture, to painting not only what was on but what was behind the surface, to making a portrait into the likeness of a jig-saw puzzle with all the parts cut up and fitted together at random, and finally to cutting loose from the visible world altogether and regarding a picture as a visible piece of music whose likeness is in the mind alone.

This same rebellion against civilization and all its works was by no means confined to painting. It is nowhere more powerfully displayed than in the sculpture of Mr. Epstein, with his desire at all costs to achieve the strength and simplicity of the archaic or pre-civilized mentality, and his austere avoidance of anything that might be mistaken for tenderness. Mr. Epstein has recorded his vision of the machine age

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in his terrible *Rock Drill*, an embodiment of power, stark, soulless, inhuman, beside which Watts's Mammon seems amiable and ineffective. It is no wonder that the "poor little street-bred people" have from time to time raised piteous squeals at the shocks Mr. Epstein has persisted in administering to their nerves. This terrible fellow who would make every spade a bloody shovel—no doubt of *his* being an enemy to civilization! As early as 1908, Mr. Epstein was employed to make some statues for the headquarters of the British Medical Association in the Strand. The statues are still there, and the few people who ever look up at them would certainly be surprised to learn that they were anything else than proper. But on their first appearance, a press and public that had not turned a hair at the destruction of Regent Street, foamed and dithered with a hysterical fury, as if it had divined,

By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes!

In literature we hear the same cry of "Back to the primitive," and mark the same tendency to strip off the garments of civilization and uncover the raw passions of the savage. The gentle spirit of Mr. Masfield is incongruously possessed with sensuous delight in the raw oaths and crude passions of the roughest imaginable specimens of humanity. In 1908 John Lane, with an ear-splitting flourish of trumpets, proclaimed the advent of a new poet, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, whose work was at once acclaimed with almost as much enthusiasm as had greeted Stephen Phillips in the previous decade. Mr. Abercrombie chimed in with the mood of the moment just because he was able to impart something of primal brutality even to his metre, as, for instance, when a mother addresses her son:

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You weren't half cruel enough; you barely brought
The red flames into my eyes this time at all.
O, but it's good, the grip you have, and good
To feel it on me, try the pains of those
Who strangle. . . .

Cave-man stuff, this, of the highest literary quality !

Fauveism, or cave-manliness, was thus by no means the monopoly of one group of French painters. It was one of the most powerful tendencies of the time, and had its ramifications everywhere. Frank Harris aspired to be the lustful, all-conquering he-superman in real life, and did succeed in being the master bounder of a time singularly prolific of the species. Another example of this tendency was a strange being, T. W. H. Crosland, with a literary talent that might have borne lasting fruit, had it been employed for any other purpose than that of indiscriminate invective and abuse. He first achieved fame with an attack on the Scottish nation which might have been an amusing skit, had it not been for such incredible brutality as that of putting a bereaved father into the pillory for his too sentimental account of his little girl's funeral. But that was the worst of Crosland—he could never be really funny because his idea of fun was that of a Red Indian or a school bully, and his satire could never be deadly because it was rather too obviously the escape valve of a jaundiced disposition. So he just went on foaming at the mouth and looking for fresh things to abuse—women, Oscar Wilde, Jews, suffragettes, the countryside, the Japanese, most of his literary contemporaries—and all in the same strain of venomous jocularità.

Mr. Bottomley, the journalist who was nearest to the great heart of the people, saw the advantages of exploiting this method in his Penny Truth. Its open letters to individuals could be masterpieces in the art of giving pain—one, for instance, to poor old Oscar Browning, carefully advertised by posters at Cam-

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bridge. And one of the earliest features was a series of articles by someone calling himself Jim Crow, exploiting the most violent anti-foreign sentiment against one nation after another. And the common people, to judge by the success of his paper, and that of even greater lords of the press, gave the glad ear to any gospel of hate that could be bawled at them.

Here we have a strange and ominous division of civilization against itself. We have already tried to show the supreme necessity for some change in Man's nature corresponding to that in his environment, a progressive adaptation. It was bad enough that progress should so far have been confined to environment, and that Man should have created a world only fit for supermen, without attempting to become one. But here was something worse, for while material progress went on faster than ever, on the human side the cry was not forward to the god, but back to the brute. Even artists and visionaries were aspiring openly to become like wild beasts or children. Fauvism and Dadaism were no monopoly of the Quartier Latin. They were all-pervasive. If you had picked up any cheap popular newspaper, preferably one of those Sunday compendiums from which so many of the populace formed their notion of the world, you would have found it almost entirely divided into a Fauveist section, in which all that was foulest and most brutal in human nature was deliberately muck-raked from the week's happenings, and a Dadaist section, devoted to a cult of games and competitions so ludicrously exaggerated as to constitute an infantile obsession.

Nor was there so much difference of motive as might have been imagined between the sensitive artist shaking the dust of civilization off his feet, and the Philistine gloating over the latest murder or bellowing abuse at a referee. Each in his own way, the one by rebellion, the other by escape, was answering

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to a reality with which the conquest of nature had confronted the conqueror.

However ominous might be the significance of these tendencies, it did not prevent the Edwardian and pre-War time from being one of overflowing exuberance. It was not to be expected that English art would run to the logical extremes of the Latin temperament. There were, particularly during the hectic years immediately preceding the catastrophe, a number of English artists who vied with one another in competitive extravagances, hallowed by the magic termination "ism". But most of their work is not of the kind that courts resurrection, except in the spirit in which Victorian wax flowers are prized as curiosities.

Mr. Wells, when he hailed, with undisguised delight, the passing, in the twentieth century, of the great figure, was obviously thinking of his own art of literature. Had he turned his eyes to other fields of creation, he would have found the case reversed, for here the obviously dominating figure is even more *en evidence* than during the Victorian Age. Few will be found to dispute the supremacy, in their respective arts, of Elgar, Lutyens, and Epstein, and in painting, at the beginning of the century, the supremacy of Sargent was hardly disputed, but already before the War it was becoming apparent that a higher order of greatness was revealed in Mr. Augustus John. He was the English reply to the great Post-impressionist triumvirate, but his talent was less sharply defined than any of theirs; his work was less fitted to become the foundation of a school, or to provide a label for biographers.

Like that of Epstein, his art, in his first phase, is in defiant reaction against Victorian prettiness and sentimentality. He flings an ill-favoured visage into your face, bidding you like that if you can. Strength and ruthless sincerity are the qualities he aims at, and

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achieves. But he possessed too much of English sanity and humour to commit his genius to a life-long intransigence. The anti-Victorian phase was a bridge, to be passed over, not to be built upon. The culmination of Mr. John's career was still in the future, with that glorious portrait of Mme. Suggia, in which music seems to burst from the canvas—surely one of the world's supreme masterpieces. But enough had been achieved by 1914 to secure for John his place among the immortals, if only as a seer into the strong places of the human soul.

Since the days of the great and neglected John Riley, there have seldom been lacking masters, not always British born, to maintain the great tradition of English portrait painting. Thus when the cosmopolitan, Sargent, in 1910, transferred his genius to other fields, it was already evident that there was an Irishman, Orpen, who combined with an unsurpassed faculty for hitting off a likeness all, and more than all, of Sargent's capacity for tearing the soul out of a sitter, even when the result would have justified Charles II's remark to Riley, "Is this I? Then Oddsfish, I am an ugly fellow." Not that this was likely to be apparent to sitters of less intelligence than the Merry Monarch.

On the rest of the achievements of this intensely vital period of artistic production, space forbids us to enlarge. Our immediate purpose is with the answer to that ever more insistent query—*Quo Vadis?* From those makers who have preserved their freedom the answer is—"Full speed ahead!" Which, if you come to think of it, is rather less than no answer at all.

BOOK III

LIBERALISM ON TRIAL

CHAPTER I

LIBERALS AND LORDS

By the autumn of 1905, it had become evident that not even Mr. Balfour's skill could prolong the life of the Unionist Government. Everything appeared to go wrong with his unfortunate rump of a ministry. Easily the most talented of his colleagues, George Wyndham, had fallen foul of the Ulster Protestants, and resigned his Irish Secretaryship. An utterly unexpected blow was dealt to the prestige of Imperialism when Lord Curzon, the magnificent Viceroy of India, quarrelled with that other strong man of Empire, his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, and, failing to obtain support from the Indian Secretary, resigned in dudgeon. Mr. Chamberlain and his Tariff Reformers were now openly in revolt from Mr. Balfour's balancing tactics, and were clamorous to go to the country with a demand for a full Protectionist mandate.

Under these circumstances Mr. Balfour decided to try the chances of a last piece of finesse. He would not wait to be driven from office by the now inevitable verdict of the electorate; he would resign of his own accord and leave his opponents to form a Government if they could. Their two sections of Imperialists and former Pro-Boers had been at variance for years—the attempt to combine them into one ministry might easily result in widening the crack into an open fissure. But Mr. Balfour had proved too clever by half, and though it was only by the

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narrowest of margins that the split was averted, outwardly all was harmony, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman succeeded in forming a Cabinet of all the talents, with the solitary exception of Lord Rosebery. It was a combination of impressive ability, and no one could fail to contrast it with the scratch team that had followed Mr. Balfour into the wilderness.

The new Government lost no time in taking the verdict of the constituencies. Popular feeling had been excited to an unprecedented pitch, and there were signs of a new spirit abroad that would have horrified Mr. Gladstone. Such sentiments were chorused as

Why should we be beggars with the ballot in our hand?

which Karl Marx himself could hardly have bettered. Violence and hooliganism were ominously *en evidence*—even Mr. Chamberlain was shouted down at Derby. A substantial turnover was expected, but even the most sanguine Liberal had not reckoned enough on the emotional suggestibility of the electorate. The cumulative effect of Chinese Labour and Passive Resistance propaganda, of the organized team-spirit of the Trades Unions, the almost religious cult of Free Trade, and the disillusionment that had followed the imperialist heroics of the nineties, was to stampede that comparatively small number of voters of unfixed sympathies by whom the fate of elections is determined. Even the bellows of the two great yellow combines in favour of Tariff Reform passed, for once, comparatively unheeded.

It was early in January, 1906, that the first returns began to come in. A solitary election at Ipswich, on the 12th, went heavily in favour of the new Government, and on the next day, the landslide set in. The Unionists, including Mr. Balfour himself, were swept clean out of Manchester and Salford, and as day followed day, and the tale of disaster lengthened, it

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became evident that Mr. Chamberlain's propaganda had aroused so violent an opposition in the Industrial North as to render it extremely doubtful whether a Unionist Party, committed to the imposition of food taxes, could hope to recover its majority in any circumstances. This, though its significance was lost on the Tapers and Tadpoles of the party game, was destined to be a determining political factor for the ensuing quarter of a century.

One solitary consolation for the Unionists was in Mr. Chamberlain's own city of Birmingham, which was as solid for Tariff Reform as Manchester was against it. This was no doubt partly due to his well-earned civic prestige, but perhaps even more to the fact that Birmingham, as a centre of the steel and armament trade, has a bias, that is as old as the War of American Independence, in favour of a militant nationalism. But the counties, the traditional strongholds of conservative sentiment, to which a Protectionist programme might have been expected to make its greatest appeal, only added to the record of disaster, and the depth of Unionist unpopularity might be gauged by the defection even of the safest seats. When the final results were declared, the party that had reigned supreme, with one brief interval, for the last two decades, returned to Westminster a miserable remnant, deprived of most of its leaders.

A fact of the greatest significance was that the Liberals, for the duration of the new Parliament, were, as after Gladstone's Midlothian triumph of 1880, independent of Irish support. The ultimately inevitable crisis, foreseen by Parnell, in which Ireland would hold the balance between the English parties, and therefore be able to dictate her own terms to the larger nation, was still postponed. The Liberals, having a free hand, were only too glad to shelve the question of Home Rule, which was no popular cause in England, and whose revival would give

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the House of Lords an excuse for repeating its tactics of 1893.

With an apparently permanent loyalty of the Industrial North to Free Trade, and the temporary freedom from Irish dictation, the prospects of the Liberal Party might have seemed bright beyond the dreams of optimism. But a third factor had contributed to the triumph, which, had the pundits only been capable of reading the signs of the times, might have adumbrated a menace more deadly than any to be apprehended from the official opposition. For on the Left of the victorious army had appeared a new and compact force of fifty-three representatives of the new Labour, or working-class party, allies whom the Liberals welcomed with the same effusive cordiality that the Romano-Britons probably extended to the sea-dogs of Hengist and Horsa. Of the fifty-three, twenty-four might have been described as hyphenated Labourites, pledged to some sort of support of Liberalism, but the other twenty-nine formed an avowedly independent party, pledged to a policy of Socialism very different from anything that would be likely to find favour with the prosperous gentlemen who crowded the benches to the right of the Speaker.

What did this imply? Hitherto the Liberal Party, though its centre of gravity may have been in the lower middle class from which sprung the great Non-conformist interest, had relied with confidence on the support of the working-class elector, who, when Disraeli had presented him with the franchise, had said, at the polls—"Thank you, Mr. Gladstone." It had been Queen Victoria's insistent complaint against Gladstone that he had deliberately laid himself out to attract the suffrages of the mob by exciting class hatred. After the formation of the Primrose League and the defection of the Whig aristocracy, it had indeed been the cue of the Liberals to represent themselves as espousing the cause of the Have-nots

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against the reactionary Haves. It was their card to trump the Imperialist ace. "Why should we be beggars with the ballot in our hand?" meant, quite obviously, that if the poor man voted the Liberals into power, that power would be used to confer substantial gifts on the poor man.

This was a game at which the Liberals could always count on outbidding a party calling itself Conservative, and relying to so large an extent on the support of the propertied classes. But it was unfortunately a game at which every party can be outbid by the one next on the left. If the poor man is taught to value his rulers by what they have to offer, it is only natural for him to close with the highest bid. If it is a question of exciting class feeling, then who can be so well calculated to implement it as one of the class from which you yourself are sprung? The appearance of a Labour Party was an advertisement to every working-class elector that the time was past for him to depute the sovereignty that was his by right to frock-coated capitalists, with a vested interest in things as they were. And as the menace from the left became more alarming, those who had anything to lose would naturally tend to gravitate towards the right, and to be frightened by any appearance of coquetting with Socialism. So that the Liberal Party appeared bound in course of time to be crushed between the Socialist hammer and the Conservative anvil.

Was there any chance of averting such a contingency? Certainly none whatever, if the Marxian doctrine were true of the economic motive being supreme in human affairs. But there are some who think more nobly of human nature, and believe that men are capable of being more strongly moved by their ideals than by their interests. It might be that the Liberal panacea of freedom would have greater attractions than the grim remedy of class war, and that the good old cause of Bright and Gladstone

would be the good old cause still. But for that faith was needed—and was faith to be found in an age of such universal cynicism as the early twentieth century? Time would show, but meanwhile it was ominous that almost everywhere on the Continent the old generous Liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century had gone down before the advance of an all-conquering nationalism, with less sentiment about it than might inspire an average burglar. Meanwhile, what might have been certain to any far-sighted observer was that unless Liberalism could take its stand on its ideals, it would find itself, some day, with nothing at all to stand on.

To those who understood the inner workings of politics, it would have been apparent that the Liberal, no less than other parties, had come to rely upon support that had not the least connection with idealism. There was nothing Liberal in the accumulation of huge secret party funds, raised to a large extent by such flagrant corruption as the sale of honours nominally in the gift of the Crown, and jealously shielded from any sort of public scrutiny or criticism. There was nothing Liberal in the organized regimentation of the electorate that was the object of the great party machines, or caucuses, of which such funds were the driving power, or in the endless backstair work and secret wirepulling that such a system involved, the stifling of free discussion and the shameless appeals to collective emotion. It was no excuse that the Tories had freely availed themselves of such methods. It was for the now all-powerful Liberals to say with authority, "Let there be light!" But it was soon apparent that they, no less than the Tories—or, for that matter, the hard-bitten Trades Unionists of the new Labour Party—had reason for loving darkness rather than light.

A certain frothy arrogance was perhaps inevitable before the record majority settled down to the busi-

ness of translating progress into legislation. For a couple of days, in a congested session, the House of Commons resolved itself into an academic debating society in order that a predetermined verdict—that could bind nobody—might be registered in favour of Free Trade.

There was a different story to tell about Chinese Labour, that had been denounced on every hoarding and every platform as slavery under the British flag. Earnest Liberals had expected nothing less than that this iniquity should be put down with a prompt and strong hand. Nothing of the sort happened. The coolies continued to serve out their indentures on the Rand, and the wily Rand-lords had hurriedly issued some 14,000 fresh indentures with which the Government professed itself powerless to interfere. It was only under pressure from its own disillusioned rank and file that it decreed that no fresh indentures would be allowed. Even so, it was four years before the last Chinamen had left the Rand, and by that time it was possible to arrange for a supply of native South African labour without too much inconvenience to the mineowners. The Government's action, no less than its electioneering propaganda, was defensible on Machiavellian, but hardly on Liberal grounds.

The panacea of Liberalism was indeed applied, with conspicuous success, in South Africa, when the Government decided to scrap the transitional constitution that the Unionists had granted to the Transvaal, and to hand back to the annexed Republics a practically full measure of liberty under the flag. In spite of apocalyptic denunciation by Mr. Kipling, this dangerous, audacious and reckless experiment, as Mr. Balfour described it, led straight to that union of South Africa within the Empire which had been the goal of English policy in days before the blunder, that culminated in the first Boer War, had planted the seeds of hatred between the two races. It might

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have been fairly claimed that this one act of faith had accomplished more than two and a half years of fighting.

Work of a different order awaited the Government at home. No time could be found in the first session to lay the foundations of that social reform of which such high hopes had been raised. The interminable squabble between Church and Chapel in the schools, and the excitement that had been worked up over the Passive Resistance campaign, made it imperative that the leading measure should be called an Education Bill, though there was hardly the least pretence of its being designed to raise the standard of education. This measure was entrusted to Mr. Augustine Birrell, whose reputation as a man of letters was sufficiently high to have enriched the language with a new word. To Birrell a subject was to glide over it in a mood of urbane satire as if nothing were worth taking seriously. Mr. Birrell produced a very complicated measure which few ordinary people understood except in the sense that it was intended to favour the Chapel at the expense of the Church, that there would be rather more "simple Bible teaching" and rather less catechism, but that otherwise Tommy would derive about as much, and as little, benefit from his pastors and masters as before.

Meanwhile the grievance of the Trades Unionists had been redressed by a Bill that at first restored to them considerably less than the privileged position they had enjoyed before the ill-starred Taff Vale judgment, but which the menacing insistence of Labour got changed to a plain absolution of the Union funds from liability for wrongs committed by individual members in furtherance of trades disputes. The third principal measure was a Plural Voting Bill which, whatever its merits in the abstract, would admittedly have the effect of diminishing the Tory chances at any future election.

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These measures, having been duly voted through the Commons, were sent up to the Lords for the formality of endorsement. For eleven years, now, the man in the street had almost forgotten that there was a House of Lords, except for purposes of ceremonial. A few politically minded peers had duly assembled to pass such measures as the Unionist Government had succeeded in getting through the Commons by the end of each session, and the rest had, wisely devoted themselves to their estates and their amusements. The Second Chamber had, in fact, since its great triumph over Gladstone's last ministry, come to function quite undisguisedly as a humble adjunct of the Unionist caucus.

This was the more to be regretted, as the need for some check upon the omnipotence of the Commons was hardly to be denied. To say that the popular will was accurately expressed by every measure that a disciplined majority voted through the Lower House, was an abuse of language too flagrant to be plausible. Not only were millions of voters worse than unrepresented, since they had actually voted to prevent their sitting members from representing them, but even the simplest voter's will was a more complex thing than could be comprehended by a cross opposite some unknown person's name. The man might be a Free Trader and yet an ardent Churchman, he might be equally against the Lords' veto and Home Rule. His decision was at best a choice of benefits or evils—more often he voted for his political team in much the same spirit as he cheered for his football team. And the blank cheque, that was all he could help to present to one party or the other, might, in the course of the next seven years, be used for any purpose that the bosses might dictate.

In criticizing the action of the Lords during the first three years of the Liberal Government, it is easy to miss the real point of the case against them. It

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is doubtful whether any of the measures they killed or mutilated were regretted by anything like a majority of the electorate, or whether any useful measure of social reform suffered vital injury at their hands. Their real guilt consisted not in their having done what they did, but the fact that they had not dreamed of doing anything before the Liberal Government came in, and that they would quite certainly cease from functioning the moment that that Government went out. Whence it might fairly have been deduced that the mainspring of their conduct was not loyalty to the popular will, nor yet a patriotic desire to get the best legislation passed, but was inspired by hope of advantage in the sort of skin game that was being played between parties, classes, nations, and empires, in these opening years of the new century.

If it was a game, the Lords played their hand—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the Unionist Party played its Lords—with a combined subtlety and boldness that reveal the master touch of Balfour. Scarcely anybody would have ventured to predict that the Upper Chamber would dare tamper with the leading measures of an enormous majority, fresh from its victory at the polls. It was an entirely different matter from flouting Gladstone's Minority Government, kept in power, and subjection, by the Irish vote. There was no precedent, since the days of the Fox-North Coalition, for such an assertion of hereditary against representative privileges. When, in 1882, Gilbert, in *Iolanthe*, had congratulated the Lords on doing nothing in particular and doing it very well, the sentiment had passed so much as a matter of course that even hidebound Tories had only chuckled tolerantly. There had been a sort of gentlemen's agreement that the Peers should play a discreet second fiddle. But in the skin game, where even formal treaties are no more than scraps of paper, there is no honour for gentlemen's agreements.

It was a shrewd calculation that Mr. Birrell's Bill had no real backing of enthusiasm, except among Nonconformist stalwarts who would vote Liberal whatever happened. The average man, who wanted to see fair play between Church and Chapel and had his doubts whether Mr. Birrell's Bill would be more likely to achieve this than Mr. Balfour's, was quite unmoved when the Lords added a number of amendments, designed to extract the sting from Mr. Birrell's clauses. Not so the Liberal majority in the Commons, whose amazed indignation could only find vent in rejecting the whole of the amendments, without condescending to discuss them separately. So the Lords quietly let the Bill die, and sent the Plural Voting Bill to join it on the scrap-heap. But for the passage of the Trades Disputes Bill, which had the formidable backing of Labour, their lordships stood politely aside, though there can be little doubt that they disapproved of it more vigorously than either of the other two.

And so, as one of the Liberal papers expressed it, "the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea." The Lords must be mad to affront the majesty of the people thus openly! Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman used words of impressive menace: "The resources of the Constitution are not exhausted." This could only mean that the challenge would be promptly and boldly met by a reform of the Constitution, and that if the Lords were still mad enough to oppose their veto, the Government would invoke a verdict of the people, on behalf of its representatives, decisive enough to justify that wholesale creation of peers, whose very threat had been enough to secure the passing of the great Reform Bill. If the action of the Lords had been as flagrantly unpopular as, in Liberal circles, it was made out to be, this course would have been obvious, and a victory, more overwhelming and fruitful than the last, certain.

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But it was by no means certain that the fate of two notoriously partisan measures was calculated to arouse the requisite indignation among those voters of uncertain allegiance who determine the issue of elections. Nor had the Government had time, during its first year of office, to place any constructive legislation of importance to its credit. That it had ended the grievance of the Trades Unions was all to the advantage of the Opposition.

So the Government decided, after all, not to grasp the nettle, and Sir Henry resigned himself to the fact that, for the nonce, the resources of the Constitution *were* exhausted. The record majority was therefore forced to content itself with the empty ceremony of passing a resolution through the Commons, to the effect that the power of the Lords ought to be so restricted as to make it possible for the will of the Commons to prevail within the limits of a single session. Thus did Mr. Snodgrass take off his coat and announce with great sound and fury that he was probably going to begin—in four or five years' time. Their lordships could fairly claim to have scored heavily in the first round of the contest they had so audaciously provoked. The side that, even for the most arguable reasons, declines a challenge does not cut a dignified figure in the public eye. Even the dropping of the Education Bill aroused surprisingly few regrets; the Passive Resistance campaign petered out, and the hottest gospellers reconciled their consciences to ignoring the mystic distinction between rates and taxes. The country was, in fact, ceasing to be interested in the Church-Chapel squabble, and was prepared to put up with Mr. Balfour's or any other settlement that would end this perpetual recurrence of storms in the parish tea-cup.

The session of 1907 was not calculated to arrest the decline of Liberal prestige. The main measure was again entrusted to Mr. Birrell, who after the fiasco

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of his Education Bill, had been transferred to the Irish Secretaryship, and offered an instalment of, or substitute for, Home Rule, in the shape of an Irish elected assembly, with no legislative or fiscal powers, but with a certain limited control over purely Irish administration. This Bill did not even get to the Upper House for rejection, since the Nationalists, well aware of their power to impose their own terms on any future Parliament in which the difference between English parties should be less than ninety-odd, contemptuously refused to countenance anything short of a full measure of Home Rule.

The Government did no doubt accomplish work of the first importance during this session, but hardly of the kind to arouse special enthusiasm among Liberal electors. Mr. Haldane, a lawyer-metaphysician, in whom a voluble tongue was conjoined with an incongruously lucid brain, accomplished a reform of army administration that had baffled a series of Unionist ministers, and not only transformed the old Volunteers into a far more efficient Territorial Army, but created a striking force of six regular divisions, fully equipped for taking its place on the left wing of a French, or Franco-Belgian army, at a few days' notice. Of course it would never have done to have openly envisaged such a contingency, still less to have revealed to the Liberal rank and file that the necessary arrangements between the three Staffs were actually being concerted.

During 1907, the Lords had been fairly quiescent, confining their functions of revision and rejection to some not specially important Land Bills—land being a subject on which peers were traditionally sensitive. In the session of 1908, the controversy between the two Houses flared up with greater intensity than ever. It was now time for the Liberals to placate an important section of their followers by a so-called Temperance measure, limiting the access of the lower

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classes to strong drink. Such paternal compulsion could more easily have been justified on Tory principles than by Liberal doctrines of freedom and equality. But the Licensed Victualling Trade, like the Church, had long been in alliance with the Tories ; every public house was, to some extent, a focus of Unionist propaganda, and there perhaps lingered on some of the opposition between the jolly, roystering cavalier and the austere Puritan.

It was not surprising, under these circumstances, that an attempt to solve the problem on comprehensive and scientific lines should have been outside the scope of practical politics. Those who demanded temperance were stultifying their own professions when they sought to deny the poor the opportunity of exercising that virtue, and those Christians would seem to have been somewhat lacking in humour who pinned their faith to legislation that would have justified Pilate in condemning Christ as a wine-bibber and liquor-manufacturer. The cause of temperance, not to speak of liberty, would have been better served by providing that the poor man, like the rich, should be enabled to gladden his heart, when he felt so disposed, with unadulterated liquor in decent surroundings, instead of having to swill the poisonous concoctions that made him not drunk but drugged, in places that might have borne the motto of the legendary Chinaman, "No drinkee for drinkee, drinkee for drunkee !"

But the Liberal Government cared for none of these things. Its remedy for drunkenness was one for which the political were more obvious than the social arguments, and consisted in an endeavour to reduce the number of licensed houses, though it was at least a doubtful proposition whether a few large and proportionately crowded bars and gin palaces would conduce to less drunkenness than a larger number of smaller pubs. A drastic reduction of licences was to

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take place within a time limit of fourteen years, and though local option, or the right of a majority in any locality to bar the access of a minority to liquor, had been one of the principal causes of the last Liberal Government's *débâcle*, it was now reintroduced in a modified form.

Except among an earnest minority of coercionists, the Bill had no popular backing. It was, quite undisguisedly, a piece of class legislation, for no moderately well-off person, unless he held brewery shares, was likely to be seriously affected by it. It was too much to expect the poor man to enthuse for having his drunken habits reformed by his betters. Long ago he had voiced his sentiments in the thoroughly English refrain,

Damn his eyes, whoever tries
To rob a poor man of his beer !

and it was in a similar spirit that he now warned Mr. Asquith, who, on Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's death, had succeeded to the Premiership,

If you try to tax the poor man's beer
I'll meet you one dark night.

It was remarked—though few would have had the bad taste to write it—that by no means all those responsible for the Bill had the reputation of being teetotal fanatics, nor, when 200 Liberal members gave a complimentary dinner to Mr. Asquith, in appreciation of his conduct of the Bill, was there any stint of the good cheer customary on such occasions. Most significant of all was a by-election fought with extraordinary intensity on both sides in the dreary constituency of Peckham, which resulted in a Liberal majority of over 2,000 being turned into a Conservative majority of about the same amount.

Under these circumstances the opportunity for the Lords to inflict another public humiliation on their

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now avowed enemies was too obvious to be resisted. In rejecting the Bill they would be more representative of popular sentiment than the Commons in passing it. But they proceeded to do the obvious thing with an indifference to public opinion, and public decency, that recalled the god-provoking *hubris* of Greek tragedy. Before the Bill had been even debated by the Lords, some 250 Unionist peers met in the private house of their leader, Lord Lansdowne, and decided to reject it. This advertisement that no arguments that could be urged in favour of the Bill, whether by the King's Ministers, or by the Archbishop of Canterbury and his fellow-bishops, would be allowed to weigh in the balance against a pre-determined fiat of the Unionist caucus, was rather too cynical even for Edwardian standards.

For all that, the Lords had scored, and more heavily than before. There was not the least sign, even after the Lansdowne House meeting, of any widespread indignation against their proceedings. They had held up no useful or constructive measures—neither the Education nor the Licensing Bill

to such aureate earth was turned
As buried once, men want dug up again,

and time was to show that not only the Bills themselves, but the very demand for them, could fade out of memory. The effect of the veto had been to leave the Government powerful for national but not for party legislation. But why only a Liberal Government? The Liberals had the human grievance of the boy who is caned for crimes with which his favoured brother gets away scot-free.

Certainly, at the end of 1908, the Liberal stock had slumped to an extent of which no one would have dared to dream on the morrow of the 1906 election. But there were factors in the situation that rendered it unsafe to stake too much upon the hope of a Unionist

recovery. A general election, though it might ostensibly be fought on the constitutional issue, might be determined by quite irrelevant causes. So long as the Industrial North continued uncompromising in its allegiance to Free Trade, Tariff Reform remained an electoral millstone that Mr. Chamberlain had fastened round the neck of Unionism.

Besides, the Government was at last beginning to redeem some part of its promise of social reform. The grant of a weekly five shillings was made to such of the population as had passed the allotted human span, and whose income did not exceed £21 a year. Above £21 the pensions fell a shilling for every extra 2½ guineas of income, until, at £31 10s., it faded out altogether. This, though an exiguous enough dole in itself, was more than two Unionist Governments had succeeded in conferring, in spite of its being an avowed part of Mr. Chamberlain's policy. There were other measures, too, notably a Town Planning Act, by that now indefatigable bureaucrat, Mr. John Burns, an Eight Hours Act for Miners, a Minimum Wage Act for sweated industries, and one of a rather different order regulating the conduct of the poor towards their children, and imposing certain restrictions on the children themselves. There was also an attempt to render it possible to imprison certain persons, classed as habitual criminals, for any period whatever at the discretion of the authorities, though this was boiled down, under pressure, into the power of a judge to add an extra, but determinate, sentence to one passed in the ordinary way. Altogether, taking the good with the bad, the Liberal Government had at least given evidence of an energy and reforming zeal that contrasted favourably with the inertia of its predecessors. It was by no means certain that the electorate would want to change the new live wire for the old dead one.

CHAPTER II

DUAL INTO TRIPLE

Whatever else might have been thought of the Liberal Government, it was taken for granted on all hands that it stood for peace, peace—as its opponents complained—at almost any price. Ever since the Boer War, it had been the fashion to accuse the Liberals of being friends of every country but their own, if not actual traitors. It no doubt had a soothing effect when it became known that Lord Lansdowne's successor in the Foreign Office was Sir Edward Grey, on whose patriotism not even the wildest Jingo could cast a doubt. Sir Edward was steeped in the Whig tradition of his Northumbrian family, and bore the same reputation for inflexible uprightness that had distinguished his great ancestor of the Reform Bill. Even the German ambassador, who was not likely to be biased in favour of English diplomats, could report to the Chancellor that Grey impressed him as being “a frank straightforward man, and one knows where one is with him.”

Nor can there be the least doubt that Sir Edward Grey sought peace and ensued it with as sincere a devotion as that great Whig pacifist, Charles James Fox. But even of Fox it was admitted by the Tory, Sir Walter Scott, that when, at long last, he had had an opportunity of putting his principles into practice as Foreign Secretary, even he

A Briton died. . . .

E'en then dishonour's peace he spurned,
The sullied olive branch returned,
Stood for his country's glory fast,
And nailed her colours to the mast.

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The same might have been said with perfect truth of Sir Edward Grey. In this he differed little enough from other European Foreign Ministers, who were all equally sincere in promoting the glory of their respective countries. But there was a world of difference between Grey and such statesmen as Bülow, Holstein, Isvolsky, Aehrenthal, and Sazonoff. Sir Edward was what his penetrating yet candid glance proclaimed him at first sight, a man not only incapable of lying, but of any speech or conduct in the remotest degree underhand. Even for the sake of his country he could never have condescended to the sharp practice that was almost a part of diplomatic routine—he would not have known how to begin. And hence, among men who knew no other way, and to whom every professed motive was but the mask for some ulterior design, the very innocence of his conduct sometimes had the effect of the deepest guile. Moreover, the straightforward simplicity of his words and actions did, on occasion, render him blind to the interpretation that, in the insanely sophisticated world of international diplomacy, might be put upon both. And he, in his turn, was liable to ignore the ulterior motives of those with whom he entered into partnership. To trust to the honour of others at the expense of third parties may be chivalrous, but it is not always just.

The significance of the change of ministers at Whitehall was considerably diminished by the convention, that Sir Edward was fully determined to honour, of the essential continuity of British foreign policy. He was content to take up the threads of Lord Lansdowne's bold and skilful policy, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he, like Lord Lansdowne, allowed the experts of the Foreign Office to play out the hand with a minimum of amateur interference.

Already, since the new orientation of British policy,

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tension with Germany had increased to an extent that rendered the possibility of a European War, with or without warning, apparent even to the man in the street. Rumour was already busy in exploiting the sensational possibilities of the situation. M. Delcassé's resignation was said to have been the result of a German ultimatum. And England was supposed to have covenanted with France, in the event of a rupture with Germany on the Moroccan question, to make a diversion by landing a force variously estimated at 100 to 120 thousand men on the coast of Schleswig. The evidence of Lord Sanderson and Lord Lansdowne, in the great collection of British Documents on the Origin of the War, is conclusive to the effect that no such promise was ever made, though it was certainly talked about in high quarters, and it is easy to guess its origin in the fertile brain of Sir John Fisher. But the German Government was certainly warned that if Germany attacked France in connection with the Entente, England could not remain indifferent, a sufficiently plain intimation that if there was going to be a war about Morocco, England meant to be in it. So near, in the space of one brief year, had the peaceful agreement with France come to developing into an armed alliance against Germany, thanks largely to the blustering and blundering futility of the Wilhelm-Bülow-Holstein combination.

Even if the Schleswig promise was a myth, there was nothing mythical about a regrouping of England's sea forces that was plainly directed against Germany. This was due largely to the appointment, on Trafalgar Day, 1904, of Sir John Fisher as First Sea Lord. In this consciously breezy sailor the spirit of latter-day Nationalism, in its most intransigent form, was developed to an extent to which it would be hard to find a pre-War parallel, except perhaps in the Balkans. He delighted in language of picturesque brutality.

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He believed, like Clausewitz, in making war at your own chosen moment, without waiting to be forced into it, and once the issue was joined, in unlimited violence, or, as he once humorously expressed it, in hitting your enemy in the belly, kicking him when he is down, boiling his prisoners, if you take any, in oil, and torturing his women and children. He also shared Mr. Kipling's love of the Old Testament, with its fighting and nationalistic Jehovah.

No sooner had Fisher arrived at the Admiralty than he commenced a campaign of furious efficiency. Even before the conclusion of the Entente, he had satisfied himself that hostility between England and Germany was, for commercial reasons, inevitable, and on the resultant war he concentrated the whole of his superabundant energies. Scrapping scores of obsolescent ships and withdrawing others from distant stations where they had been more ornamental than useful, he proceeded to shift the centre of naval gravity from the Mediterranean to the North Sea. The whole fleet was, in fact, marshalled for the sole purpose of applying to Germany, at a moment's notice, the Sea Lord's maxim, "Hit first, hit hard, and hit anywhere."

So thoroughly did Fisher succeed in diffusing this spirit among all those with whom he came in contact, that one of the Junior Lords of the Admiralty actually blurted out words that, being uttered in public, rang from end to end of Germany, plainly implying that England, like Japan, was capable of falling on her enemy without even a declaration of war. Of course the usual disclaimers and explanations were forthcoming, but the Germans were far from being convinced. They would have been even more disquieted, could they have known that Fisher, if he could have had his way, would have dealt with the German fleet, once and for all, by what he called Copenhagening it—a reference to not the most scrupu-

lous episode in British history, when the Danish capital had been bombarded in order that, with no more shadow of provocation than Belgium was to offer Germany in 1914, the Mistress of the Seas might hack through a perilous situation by appropriating her neighbour's fleet. In other words, Fisher would, with or without excuse, have scuppered the German fleet in its own harbours. As these harbours were guarded by forts and mines, it is difficult to see how any seaman, let alone one so able as Fisher, could have hoped to carry out this purpose except by surprise against an unsuspecting neighbour. It is to the credit of Edward VII that, when Fisher broached this ultra-Clausewitzian project to him, he merely exclaimed, "Fisher, you're mad!"

Fisher, denied his Copenhagen, devoted his genius to scoring a more legitimate point at Germany's expense. He was one of the first to divine the coming of a new era in battleship construction that would render all existing fleets obsolete. The day of all-big-gun ship was at hand, and already an Italian designer, Captain Cuniberti, had planned a ship to mount a dozen 12-inch guns, instead of the customary four. Fisher determined that England should be first in the field with this type of ship, and the result was the *Dreadnought*, completed, by extraordinary efforts, within less than a year from the laying down of her keel plate. The charge often levelled against Fisher, that he had no business to start a new competition in *Dreadnought* building, in which England would forfeit the advantage of her previous supremacy, is merely inept. The *Dreadnought* followed logically from the new power of the long-range gun, which no one realized better than Fisher, and if England had not got the start, Germany would undoubtedly have seized it, a contingency that would have afforded some justification for panic-mongers.

When the Liberal Government came into office,

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Germany had become definitely the enemy, and the German Peril was already a catch phrase. The most influential organs of opinion were lustily engaged in torturing their readers into an agony of terror-stricken patriotism. The same Mr. Le Queux, who had already, in the early nineties, produced an account of a hair-raising Franco-Russian invasion, due in 1897, was turned on by the *Daily Mail* to describe an even more horrid and thrilling German invasion in 1910, and this was advertised in the streets of London—where the juiciest massacres were booked to take place—by a procession of sandwich-men, slouching along in the uniforms of Prussian infantrymen. It was no easy task for peace-loving ministers, when the slightest visible relaxation of warlike activity was enough to start a panic, and when it was a patriotic duty to take the worst possible view of everything the Germans said or did. And of course, precisely the same sort of thing was going on in Germany.

Meanwhile, the Conference on Morocco, that the Germans had rattled the sabre so hard to secure, came off early in 1906 at Algeciras. There was the usual comedy of diplomatists professedly sitting in council to arrive at a fair settlement of an international difficulty, but really each working with the single-hearted aim of promoting the interests of his own country. From the German point of view, the Conference was a complete failure, and had the effect of revealing that Germany had now not a single ally, with the exception of Austria, on whom she could count, for the third partner in the Triplice, Italy, was plainly beginning to coquette with the Entente. Any hopes that might have been raised at Berlin by the change of Government in England must have been shattered when it became evident that English policy was at the service of French ambitions in Morocco. When the Germans found the proceedings of the Conference getting out of their control, there was more business with

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the sabre—a certain Count Tattenbach translated Jingo into the most elegant Prussian, by remarking that Germany didn't want to fight, but that if she did she would squash her enemies like bugs¹—but nobody was perturbed, and the Conference ended in a patched-up settlement by which France was supposed to have scored, and the Entente to have been proportionately strengthened.

It mattered little to anybody, and was probably highly agreeable to France, that the settlement was about as effective as an attempt to stop a leak with brown paper. The Sultan's authority was left nominally intact, but he was to be "assisted" by a Franco-Spanish police force under a Swiss chief. And if *that* did not succeed in stopping the distressing incidents that were the fruit of Moorish anarchy . . . why then, the civilizing power of France might find itself *compelled* to act, though no doubt with exemplary regret.

Another consequence followed by the rules of the international skin game. For when one player has been scored off under any circumstances, it is necessary for him to redress the balance at all costs in the near future, by scoring even more heavily somewhere else and so, if not *ad infinitum*, at least *ad Armageddon*. Now the Anglo-French Entente had registered a decided enough score over Germany to lead to the downfall of Holstein, who, as the Kaiser himself put it, had "constantly stirred up the poison against France." The old man, ruined and friendless, did not live to see the catastrophe that his blind cunning had prepared for his master, his country, and his species. If any sweetness came to his last embittered years, it was from the consciousness of patriotic virtue unrewarded.

The Morocco crisis was but the first of a series that, at intervals of two or three years, brought Europe

¹ *Lord Carnock*, by Harold Nicolson, p. 193.

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to edge of war, and finally over the edge. Even the intervals were spent in feverish preparation and manœuvring for position. Now that the nations were beginning to form up into two teams of approximately equal strength, each convinced of its mortal peril from the other, it became more and more plain that national egotism was hurrying fast to its logical conclusion in general suicide. It was a conclusion that hardly anybody, except the hardened professionals who wanted to play their war game with real bullets, could envisage without a shudder. And yet, though few willed the end, hardly any failed to will the means, and the competition of grab and chicane was pursued without the least regard for justice, principle, or common prudence. Civilization was tragically failing to control its own destinies.

The next move in the game was the natural sequel to the testing of the Dual Entente in this business of Morocco. England had already come within measurable distance of war in her support of France ; it was evident that if that support was to be continued, she would have to be prepared at any moment to unsheathe the sword on behalf of her as yet uncovenanted partner. What could be more foolish than to leave all the arrangements for so momentous a contingency to be improvised after war had actually broken out ? Every soldier realized that the endeavour of a Germany steeped in the tradition of Clausewitz and Moltke would be to fall on her nearest adversary, with annihilating violence, in the first weeks of the war. Of what service could the small English army be, thrown into action without a plan, and with all those complicated staff arrangements, so essential to co-operation between allies and to the maintenance of an expeditionary force even on friendly soil, left to be thought out, as it were, between the saddle and the ground ?

But the Liberal Government was sincerely anxious

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for peace, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who more than any of his colleagues represented the spirit of old-fashioned Liberalism, was determined not to be drawn into any line of conduct that might be taken to imply so much as an honourable understanding to regard the Entente in the light of an alliance. All French overtures for the formal conclusion of such an alliance were courteously set aside, and down to the very outbreak of the War, Sir Edward Grey made it clear that his country retained her entire freedom of choice between peace and war. But if she were incapable of waging war effectively, could her choice be described as free? And what statesman, of Grey's calibre, would dare risk the guilt of sending an army to disaster that timely forethought might have averted?

Sir Edward Grey took just such action as might have been expected of him. While making it as clear as he could that England was in no way committed to come to the aid of France, he nevertheless was prepared to authorize the framing of joint plans of action between their respective military and naval authorities, as well as those of England and Belgium, in view of such a possibility. But what seems almost incredible—this most fateful decision was not even communicated to the general body of the Cabinet, some of whose members would no doubt have honoured their pacifist principles to the extent of raising difficulties. It is doubtful, indeed, whether Sir Edward himself realized the full significance of the new departure. For once having got to the point of framing joint plans of campaign, it would be almost impossible for England—without laying herself open to a charge of the blackest treachery—to leave the French and Belgians to fight it out alone against Germany.

Lord Grey has himself put on record his opinion, or instinctive feeling, in these early days of office,

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"that if Germany forced war on France in order to destroy the Anglo-French Agreement, we ought to go to the help of France. We should be isolated and discredited if we stood aside; hated by those whom we had refused to help, and despised by others. I thought, too, that when the time came, if it ever did come, when Germany attacked France, public opinion here would be so moved that Britain would intervene on the side of France."¹

It is true that he goes to qualify this statement by saying that Britain would not help France if she appeared aggressive. But a similar qualification could have been made even of the Dual and Triple Alliances. It is evident that the Foreign Minister believed in his heart of hearts that his country's honour and interests demanded that she should act, should the occasion arise, as if a precisely similar alliance had been actually concluded between England and France, and that though he was incapable of plotting to commit her to such action, he was perhaps not as sensitive as he might otherwise have been to the psychological necessity that followed from authorizing the soldiers to work out plans on an assumption of comradeship.

These staff conversations had another effect only less momentous than that of making it a moral impossibility for England to keep out of the next Franco-German War. For in course of time, they committed her to wage war in a manner foreign to her historical traditions, and to apply her military power without due regard to the circumstances of her geographical position. It was almost inevitable that once the two staffs entered into partnership, the greater should draw the less, and the French military chiefs could think of no other rôle for the British Army than that of an auxiliary to their own on what afterwards came to be known as the Western Front. It is significant that the first rumours of England's support to France contemplated the use of her regular army as an entirely independent force, availing itself to the fullest extent

¹ *Twenty-five Years*, Vol. I, p. 77.

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of that freedom of action which, as Lord Bacon long ago divined, is conferred by sea power. Sir John Fisher who, despite the fact of his uniform being blue and not red, had incomparably the greatest *flair* for grand strategy of anyone in the two services, to the end of his life was faithful to this ideal. But the French commanders knew exactly what they wanted, and strategical theory was not the strong suit of the British Army. When at last England was finally committed to the rôle that was to annihilate the flower of her manhood in the mud of Flanders and Picardy is not easy to determine, but it appears certain that by the time of the Agadir crisis, in 1911, the place of her expeditionary force on the left wing of the French Army had been definitely determined, and thenceforward the star of Wilson, the evil genius of the British Army and loyal backer of the French Staff, was in the ascendant.

Now that the Entente with France had taken on a definitely militant and anti-German complexion, the advantages of an understanding between England and France's partner in the Dual Alliance were too obvious to be overlooked. The new Germanophobia had outdated the Russophobia that had obsessed the English mind since the Berlin Treaty. One effect of the free hand that England had given to Japan for her attack upon Russia, had been to dispel for an indefinite period any prospect of a Russian invasion of India—and by the terms of the renewed alliance, Japan was pledged to come to England's aid in such a contingency. It remained only to remove, by a similar agreement to that with France, all causes of friction in the countries adjacent to India, before the Dual Entente could be expanded into the Triple.

But even in the ultra-Machiavellian conditions of pre-War diplomacy, partnership with Tsarist despotism was an enormous pill for a Liberal Parliament to swallow. Thanks to the fact of England having

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backed the cause of the Japanese in the recent war, and the whole of the press propaganda having been directed to the denigration of Russia, the public was kept fully informed of the more sensational atrocities perpetrated in that unhappy country, and the iniquities of its Government lost nothing in the telling. Not that exaggeration was needful, or even possible, for the state of that nightmare court was beyond the resources of journalism to depict—it would have needed some chronicler of witches' sabbaths to do it justice. The very name of Grand Duke was associated, in the public mind, with everything that was evil—when a popular burlesque wanted to suggest something incredibly absurd, it cited an imaginary defence of these dignitaries. It was true that the Tsar had been forced to allow a Duma, or Parliament, to assemble, though he took the first opportunity of dissolving it—which happened to be one of the least blameable acts of his reign. But to the British Liberal, Parliaments were Parliaments, and correspondingly sacred, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman came out with the blazing but calculated indiscretion: "*La Duma est morte! Vive la Duma!*" This, from the English Premier, did not constitute a hopeful augury for an entente with Tsardom.

But Nationalism makes strange bedfellows, and it was so obviously the correct move in the international skin game for England and Russia to come together, that both sides were prepared to swallow a good deal. England was fortunate enough to have at St. Petersburg perhaps the ablest of a very able team of professional diplomatists, Sir Arthur Nicolson, who had already, with brilliant success, represented his country at the Algeciras Conference. With infinite tact and patience, Sir Arthur went to work with the Russian Foreign Minister, Isvolsky, and step by step a triple bargain concerning Tibet, Afghanistan and Persia—one far harder to conclude than that with France in

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1904—was hammered out between them. In 1907 the terms of this great settlement of the Middle East were communicated to the world. It was a masterpiece of diplomatic compromise, and King Edward's glowing appreciation of "my dear Nicolson" was not ill-deserved. Even Germany could offer no open objection to an arrangement so ostensibly pacific.

But what of the three Oriental peoples immediately concerned? For Tibet and Afghanistan, to whom was assigned the comfortable part of buffer states, the arrangement no doubt signified a blessed freedom from European interference. It was otherwise with the ancient kingdom of Persia, which had owed such freedom as she had hitherto enjoyed to her success in playing off England and Russia against each other, and now found herself partitioned into three zones, or spheres of influence, the northern, including the capital, being assigned to Russia, a corner in the south-east, selected with an eye to military security, going to England, and a neutral zone being left between. The strict independence and integrity of Persia was, of course, formally guaranteed. The interpretation placed upon the bargain by Russia was delightfully simple. She was now free to fasten upon Northern Persia as she had wished to fasten upon Korea, and subject it to the process euphemistically known as civilization.

The Russian authorities, from the Grand Dukes downwards, were not the men to do this sort of thing by halves. They rightly interpreted the new agreement as an implied promise from Sir Edward Grey to turn a Nelson eye to any proceedings whatever that Russia might see fit to take in her allotted sphere.

It happened that the Persians themselves, having got rid of a tyrannical Shah, in 1909, embarked upon a pathetic effort to set their house in order upon constitutional lines. This, of course, was a thing that the Russians could no more tolerate than Gilbert's

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Father Paul could allow the reformation of a bandit from the absolution of whose crimes no small part of his priestly income was derived. Russian troops were called in—according to the customary formula of civilization—for the protection of their nationals, and showed every disposition to stay put. Sir Edward Grey, like the good Liberal he was, entered a formal protest, and was answered by whatever is the diplomatic equivalent of a wink. Hardly had the new Government got into the saddle, than the old deposed tyrant reappeared on the scene, having passed through Russia and been provided with mineral-water cases containing munitions. A British Colonel, who proposed to reorganize the gendarmerie, was got rid of by Russian influence, and a similar fate overtook Mr. Morgan Schuster,¹ an American, who, as financial adviser to the Government, appeared capable of evolving order out of the chaos of Persian finances. Finally, in 1912, the great centre of pilgrimage, and the most sacred shrine in all Persia, that of Iman Riza, at Meshed, was bombarded, with a great slaughter of innocent people, a Russian consul-general having employed an *agent-provocateur* to make speeches of a sufficiently inflammatory nature to justify the calling in of the grey uniforms. To quote the words of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,

“The outrage excited intense feeling in Persia and, to a lesser degree, throughout the Moslem world. It demonstrated beyond all doubt the sinister policy of Russia, and was the chief cause of the hatred with which the Northern power was regarded. In

¹ “His departure was a loss . . .” says Lord Grey, “his aims were admirable and just, but he had not realized that Russian interference in North Persia could only be ousted by force; that Britain was not prepared to embark on a great European war for that purpose, that Britain was the only country that had any interest in seeing Russia restrained” (op. cit., Vol. I, p. 169). Whether Britain would have been likely to stultify her own policy by thwarting that of a prospective ally, Lord Grey refrains from saying.

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England the bombardment passed almost unnoticed, as it occurred simultaneously with the disaster to the *Titanic*, which entirely absorbed public attention.”¹

By this time, the civilizing activities of England's new partner had succeeded in reducing Persia to a highly desirable state of anarchy. But a more sympathetic attitude to Russia had come to prevail than during the Japanese War. The personality of the Tsar served as an agreeable contrast to that of the Kaiser, and even the Grand Dukes no longer figured in the newspaper pillory. The Russian Entente bade fair to be an even more successful stroke of British policy than the Japanese alliance, and the man in the street, who was told nothing about the civilizing of Persia and Korea, even if he knew where either of them were, charitably assumed that his new friends had excellent reasons for such measures as they might find themselves constrained to adopt. It is only fair to add that Sir Edward Grey was exemplary in his disapproval. To use his own words: “Incidents frequently occurred in Persia of which we were bound to complain. My remonstrances were sometimes strong and the Russian Foreign Minister would get restive.”² But that wily Muscovite was well aware that raised forefingers break no bones, and Russian policy kept the even tenor of its way.

There is a Victorian parody of some romantic pastoral that runs:

No flocks that range the forest free
To slaughter I condemn,
The butchers kill the sheep for me,
I buy the meat from them.

After all, the White Man's Burden was no Russian monopoly. In June, 1906, a particularly horrible incident occurred at the village of Denshawai, in the Nile delta. Some British officers of the Occupation

¹ 12th edition, new vols., art. *Persia*.

² op. cit., Vol. I, p. 168.

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were amusing themselves by shooting pigeons belonging to the villagers—no doubt with the permission of the head man, who may have been afraid to refuse it, or have pocketed the backsheesh for himself. The villagers, who had been subjected to the same treatment before, tried to prevent it by force, and in the scuffle a gun went off and wounded the wife of one of them. The officers were then subjected to a considerable amount of rough usage, and one of them, who ran off to get help for the others, died of sunstroke. The villagers concerned, some of whom were said to be known bad characters, were quickly brought to justice, or at any rate to vengeance. This took the form of four sentences of death by hanging, eight of torture by flogging, and various others of imprisonment ranging from life to one year. The killing and torturing were done in sight of the victims' homes, to the accompaniment of a dismal wailing from their womenfolk, and lasted altogether some two hours. Despite the fact that the British representative in Egypt, Lord Cromer, described these proceedings as "just and necessary," some indignation was aroused when the report of them reached England, and that pioneer of Imperialism, Sir Charles Dilke, was even moved to remark that if England proposed to strike terror by reports of executions and horrible floggings, she might as well withdraw from Egypt. But Sir Edward Grey was, and remained, adamant, and talked ominously about the increase of fanatical feeling in Egypt and of the "other measures, unconstitutional measures which we should be bound to take in an emergency, but which the House would regret,"¹ if the authority of the Egyptian Government were weakened. *Punch* appropriately closed the incident by a stately cartoon entitled *The Grey Knight Rides On*. And so, by the Grey Knight's leave, did the White Tsar.

¹ *Annual Register*, 1906, p. 176.

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The year after the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian agreement, the services of Edward VII were enlisted in the task of cementing the friendship, and a meeting of Royal Yachts was arranged at the Esthonian Port of Reval, for, like his nephew the Kaiser, the King had no mind to risk the perils of a landing on Russian soil. His tact was as conspicuous as ever, and after a thorough coaching from Nicolson, he astonished the Tsar and his court by his intimate knowledge of Russian affairs. The episode did not end here, for the Labour Party resented the King's advances to Russia as outspokenly as the Commons of the early seventeenth century had resented similar advances to Spain, and one of them, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, went so far as to write down the Tsar a common murderer. The King's naturally irritable temper for once got the better of his discretion, and selecting Keir Hardie and Mr. Arthur Ponsonby, the most advanced members, respectively, of the Labour and Liberal Parties, together with a solitary Communist, Victor Grayson, as the ringleaders, he inflicted a public snub on all three by refusing them invitations to a royal garden-party. As might have been anticipated, the whole Labour Party at once took up the challenge and downed teacups in portentous sympathy; the press, unable to resist so obvious a scoop, magnified the incident to the dimensions, almost, of a constitutional crisis; until His Majesty, with a return to his customary good sense, ended it by what amounted to a dignified surrender.

Thus did the demands of high policy prevail over sentiment; the Grey Knight rode on; the Dual was expanded into the Triple Entente. It was a strange, composite Ormuz that was arising to withstand the Teutonic Ahriman.

CHAPTER III

WE WANT EIGHT!

Before 1909 the game between parties had been singularly little affected by that between nations. The ordinary Englishman would get less excited over a crisis that might at any moment plunge his country into a life and death struggle, than over the trivialities of the Schools controversy, or the more decided thrills of Cup Ties and Test Matches. He was content to trust Sir Edward Grey as he had trusted Lord Lansdowne, and to take the chances of war as he did those of an influenza epidemic or a wet summer. Unlike his neighbour in France, whose nerves the menace of invasion kept continually on the stretch, the Englishman did not visualize war as affecting him vitally. The soldiers would do whatever fighting there was to be done, and the fleet would keep him and his safe from anything more serious than extra taxation—the fleet, upon whose unconquerable might reposed the fabric of his complacency.

But once let it be borne in on him that that supremacy was challenged, and there was no bottom to the depth of his alarm. It was the one matter of high policy on which he could not cheerfully resign his judgment to that of his experts. He must be satisfied for himself that he was in no danger of finding his home defenceless to invasion, or the food on which he depended no longer arriving from overseas. And for some years now the double suspicion had been germinating in his mind, fostered by an intensive newspaper propaganda, firstly, that British naval supremacy was being challenged with a greater chance

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of success than at any time in modern history, and secondly, that his own Government was dangerously and even criminally neglecting its first duty of keeping the strength of the fleet above safety level.

The problem, as the ordinary man now conceived of it, had the advantage that it could be stated in very simple terms, in fact, in one word—Dreadnoughts. He realized clearly that the advent of this new type of ship gave the Germans a unique opportunity of starting the competition again, with no greater handicaps than the slight start that Fisher's astuteness and energy in the construction of the original *Dreadnought* had conferred upon England. In quite a few years, Dreadnoughts would be the only ships to count in a fleet action, and accordingly a working test of naval supremacy would be by number of Dreadnoughts. A naval officer of course would have imported many other factors into the calculation, but the Dreadnought test was one that could easily be applied and understood, and after all the most essential thing, in the opinion even of seamen, was a winning superiority in big ships.

The ordinary man knew that the Admiralty, in the last year of Unionist administration, had stipulated for the laying down of four big ships in each annual programme of construction, and he was naturally inclined to accept this Cawdor Programme as the minimum of security. But now another Government had come in that seemed determined, at all costs, to cut down the fleet in the interests of economy. No sooner was it in the saddle than it began to tamper with the Cawdor Programme in the hope that if England set the example of slackening competition, Germany would follow. In 1906 the four new ships became three. The Germans showed every sign of speeding up rather than slackening. In 1907 there was some hope of the Second Peace Conference at The Hague accomplishing some limitation of arma-

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ments, and the four again became three. Nothing whatever was done towards limiting armaments at The Hague, for the sufficient reason that the Germans would not hear of it, and yet, so far from arrears being made up in 1908, only two Dreadnoughts were provided instead of four, thus, in three years, leaving England short, by a third, of the dozen Dreadnoughts that ought, according to the Cawdor scheme, to have been provided. And so far from any answering disposition being apparent to slacken the German rate of construction, both in 1906 and 1908 provision was made for increasing it.

There has never come to light the least evidence to justify the suspicion, widely entertained at the time and even now not entirely discredited, that the German fleet was being built with the deliberate purpose of launching an attack on England at some selected moment. Admiral von Tirpitz, that master-builder of German sea-power, does not appear to have been inspired by any special antipathy to England, still less to have cherished designs like those of Fisher, for "Copenhagening" the rival fleet. His standpoint was throughout that of a professional sailor determined to realize a certain ideal of strength and efficiency and to endow the Fatherland in course of time, and by perfectly straightforward methods, with five squadrons, each consisting of eight Dreadnoughts. If England chose to build eight, or even ten squadrons, that was her affair. The futility of two great powers throwing their resources with both hands into the sea, in order to be eight to five in squadrons instead of battleships, was not likely to appeal to the professional mind, that tends to value big battalions and big ships for their own sakes—and what admiral is there who does not feel grander in command of a fleet than of a solitary squadron? But, as Professor Brandenburg puts it, "the argument that every country shall build as many ships as it needs for its

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requirements, without heeding what others do, betrays . . . an almost incredible confusion of thought for such a vital matter.”¹

As for the Kaiser, his reactions to the idea of sea power were even more than characteristically neurotic. Since the old days of his visits to Cowes, he had never wavered in his admiration for that historic fleet whose admiral's uniform he was so proud to wear. His opinion of Treitschke's teaching that England, standing in the way of Germany's expansion, must be defeated on sea, is sufficiently indicated by one of his notes, never intended for the public eye. “We shall never be so stupid. It would be Hari-kiri!”² So wedded was he to this idea of England's naval invincibility, that in the critical opening phase of the War, he used his authority as Supreme War-lord to keep his High Seas Fleet virtually immobilized out of harm's way. It was just this consciousness of inferiority on his beloved sea that irritated the Kaiser almost to madness. The least attempt to broach the subject of an Anglo-German agreement to fix the proportions of their respective fleets was enough to make him see red. Were these English, with their insufferable superiority, to say to his Germany—“Thus far shalt thou build and no further”? Were they to be judges of how great a fleet was commensurate with their dignity and interests?

To quote another of his marginal outbursts: “The German fleet is built against nobody, and so not against England. . . . The law will be carried out to the last tittle, whether the Britons like it or not; it is the same to us. If they want war, let them begin it.”³

Such being his state of mind, the best that could have been expected from the Kaiser was that he should

¹ *From Bismarck to the World War*, by E. Brandenburg, p. 272.

² *German Diplomatic Documents*, Vol. III, p. 282.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

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have refrained from going out of his way to make a bad situation worse. But so confident was he of his own power to dominate any situation, and also so strong in his innocence of those diabolical plots which it was the habit of the Jingo press to accuse Germany of hatching, that he plunged into amateur diplomacy in order to allay the rapidly rising alarm that the growth of his fleet was causing in England. His first move, in the spring of 1908, was to dispatch a private letter to Lord Tweedmouth, First Lord of the British Admiralty, to the effect that Germany had no intention of challenging Britain's naval supremacy. Reports of this letter soon got about, and the worst possible interpretation was instantly put upon it—it was all part of a plot to prevent the English ship-building programme from being expanded; the Liberal statesman was almost a traitor to have respected such a confidence.

In the same autumn, the Kaiser followed up this indiscretion by one that put it entirely into the shade. He allowed an interview with him to be published in the *Daily Telegraph*, which took the form of one of those neurotic monologues which he generally reserved for the decent privacy of State Documents.

“You English are mad, mad, mad as March hares. . . . What can I do more than I have done? . . . To be for ever misjudged, to have my repeated offers of friendship weighed and scrutinized with jealous, mistrustful eyes, taxes my patience severely. I have said time after time that I am the friend of England, and your press, or at least a considerable section of it, bids the people of England refuse my proffered hand, and insinuates that the other holds a dagger. How can I convince a nation against its will? . . . I strive without ceasing to improve relations, and you retort that I am your arch-enemy. You make it very hard for me.”

There was a lot more in the same strain, about the Kaiser's friendly attitude during the Boer War, about the wonderful plan of campaign that he had forced on the unwilling notice of the then Prince of Wales,

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and references to the peril to the white race from England's Japanese allies—a favourite obsession of the Kaiser's, and whose inconsistency he could never see with his avowed intention of standing forth as the champion of Islam in arms.

It is proof of the extraordinary suspicion that pervaded the international atmosphere at this time, that this furiously sincere outburst was fastened on by the anti-German press as proof positive of the Kaiser's plot to lull England into a false sense of security, and that he should have been assailed with every conceivable form of ridicule and abuse. The effect on the German nationalist press was equally unfortunate, but for the precisely opposite reason that the interview evinced too great a disposition to truckle to the susceptibilities of a hated rival, and a first-class constitutional crisis was the result, that had the effect of putting a definite period to the Kaiser's experiments in conducting foreign policy behind the back of his ministers. The effect on his hypersensitive nature was that of a humiliating snub, and on questions of naval policy he became more intractable and explosive than ever. But his mood was sane and reasonable compared with the panic-stricken hatred and suspicion with which the press on both sides of the North Sea had succeeded in inoculating their respective publics. The repeated efforts that were made by statesmen like Bethmann Hollweg and Haldane, by financiers like Cassel and Ballin, by professional diplomatists like Hardinge, to find some way out of the mad competition in naval shipbuilding, were doomed to break down helplessly against the madness of those whom the gods wished to destroy.

Early in 1909, when the time approached for the naval estimates to be presented, the Man in the Street, who had hitherto taken the Government's default on the Cawdor Programme with a certain indifference, was worked up into a state of alarm bordering on

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panic. Nor can we dismiss that alarm as merely the result of a press-fed agitation, for it was rightly argued that without an unprecedented effort of shipbuilding, and therefore of taxation, the margin of British superiority over Germany might in a short time be reduced below safety level, and—in certain conceivable circumstances—vanish altogether. Moreover, despite the Kaiser's assurances that the official programme of construction would not be exceeded, no one conversant with the morality of modern Powers, and with the Prussian record of unscrupulousness, could be quite certain that such an attempt would not be made to steal a march on Britain, though it is only fair to say that nothing of the sort actually occurred.

It was easy to talk of keeping a calm head and trusting those in authority to provide for the safety of the country. But were they to be trusted? It was notorious that most of the Government's supporters were definitely pledged to reduce expenditure on the services; it was known that the present crisis was largely the result of its refusal to build up to the steady four a year of the Cawdor Programme. It was now simply a question of whether the ministers would take their political life in their hands, and make up for arrears by laying down not only the four keels due in the present year, but those other four that in accordance with their pledges and principles they had refused to lay down in previous years.

Looking back after the lapse of nearly a generation, one can see that not only the national dignity, but the cause of peace, would have been better served by lifting the question out of the field of party controversy, and adopting an impersonal attitude. England, that is to say, could have fixed a definite ratio of superiority as necessary to her safety, and made it clear that the maintenance of that ratio was a pure matter of technical calculation. It would have been

far better to have decided, once for all, that three British keels should follow every German two, as surely as night follows day, than first to have encouraged the notion that there was a real chance of the pace of construction proving too killing, and then to have made up the leeway by dint of a hair-raising orgie of anti-German and anti-Government propaganda.

Most of this propaganda, which survived the original Dreadnought scare and raged on furiously right up to the outbreak of the War, was quite irrelevant to the real danger, and was based on the assumption that the Germans, without even troubling to get command of the sea, were meditating a piece of sensational villainy, by secretly assembling, and transporting to some selected spot on the East Coast, a devoted force of 70,000 men, who, having been bundled ashore in an incredibly short space of time, would then proceed to snap their fingers at the British fleet, when it duly turned up just in time to see the last Pomeranian grenadier goose-stepping through the turnstile of Clacton Pier. Various ways were suggested to the presumably interested Germans of accomplishing this feat, one of them being the assembly of a secret armada somewhere off the Frisian coast, another, their taking advantage of a fog of record intensity, of which the supreme command had doubtless been apprised for months in advance, and which in no way interfered with the problem of marine transportation. This last was the method adopted in a play which scored a tremendous success, *The Englishman's Home*, in which the invaders, whose leader talked in significantly guttural accents, were contrasted, entirely to their own advantage, with the ridiculous Territorials and contemptible civilians who stood in their path.

The Admiralty was well aware of the technical impossibility of any such melodramatic coup, and

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Fisher, who, for all his ruthless nationalism, was singularly clear-headed, treated it with open ridicule, assuring the civilians that they could sleep quietly in their beds—for which blasphemy he too was numbered by the more intransigent Germanophobes among the traitors. But an invasion was a necessary postulate for a propaganda of conscription—only, as that word was unpopular, it was called National Service—to which even the veteran Lord Roberts lent his authority. It is possible that he may, in his heart, have realized the real purpose for which a conscript army might be required, which was that of fighting Germany on the Continent, a course to which the Staff conversations were more and more deeply committing England. But the mere suggestion of such a thing would, at this time, have aroused such indignation in the country, that no one, not even a popular hero, could have mooted it with the least chance of obtaining a hearing. So the invasion, and the 70,000, had to be worked for all they were worth.

Lord Tweedmouth's mind having given way under the strain of office, Mr. Reginald McKenna, who had succeeded Mr. Birrell as Minister of Education, was transferred to the Admiralty, and it was not long before his Sea Lords had convinced him of the gravity of the crisis. He had no easy task in persuading the Cabinet of the necessity for Dreadnought building on such an heroic scale as not even a Unionist Government had envisaged. But the evil of unbalancing a Budget was less than that of the resignation of the whole Board of Admiralty, and a compromise was arranged that gave Mr. McKenna and his Sea Lords the substance of what they wanted while gilding the pill to recalcitrant ministers and their followers in the House. It amounted to this—four of the eight required battleships were provided for in the programme, but the Government reserved the right to lay down four more should they deem it necessary.

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In the atmosphere of alarm that already pervaded the country, this was about the most unfortunate step that could have been taken. It had all the appearance of a dishonest subterfuge—that the extra four were provided for at all was taken for proof that ministers could no longer deny their necessity, that they were provided for contingently indicated that a way was being left open for shuffling out of any unpleasant responsibility at the price of leaving the country naked to her enemies.

The Opposition, which was sincerely convinced of the urgency of the crisis, had also an obvious chance of discrediting the Government, and the press had one of the most sale-stimulating cries that had offered itself since the golden days of the Boer Ultimatum and Black Week. The great armament firms, whose interest in stimulating construction was obvious, naturally tended, in England as in other countries, to use all the pull their resources conferred on them to help on the good work of making patriotic flesh creep. A perfect auction commenced of estimates of German Dreadnought strength in a few years' time—even Mr. Balfour bid as high as 25 for 1912. The feeling that the country was inevitably lost unless the contingent part of the programme was carried out crystallized itself into a slogan :

We want eight and we won't wait !

and this, which became the refrain of a Unionist song, played no small part in the return of the Opposition candidate, at a by-election at Croydon, by a greatly increased majority over that of 1906. The wildest language was used ; every effort was made to depict Germany as England's implacable enemy, and to engender a habit of regarding war between the two countries as something inevitable in a by no means remote future. The British public showed that it could panic in 1909 as wildly as it had mafficked in

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1900. Not till July did the Government yield to the inevitable and promise the contingent four.

It is the disadvantage of the historian that he has to follow the facts without yielding to his sense of artistic necessity. The story certainly demands that the contingent four should have turned out to be grossly in excess of the nation's requirements. But it is by no means certain that the panic-mongers were wrong in the substance of their demand, even though the figures quoted in its support are now seen to have been wildly exaggerated. For those Englishmen who realize how barely adequate was the fleet under Admiral Jellicoe's command, during the early months of the War, to accomplish its critical task of holding the entrances to the North Sea, even with the help of the Kaiser's providential inertia, can best judge what would have been his chances, and those of the Entente, had the strength of that fleet been diminished to the extent of four, or even fewer, Dreadnoughts.

CHAPTER IV

THE BUDGET AND THE VETO

The crisis about the navy had the effect of precipitating another that, if not more important, was at least more sensational. For the building of great ships is among the most expensive of luxuries, and the financial year in which the eight Dreadnoughts were to be laid down was also the first in which the full expense of Old Age Pensions would have to be met. This, altogether, would involve the raising of an extra sixteen millions over and above the yield of existing taxation, a mere trifle compared with the astronomical figures of post-War finance, but enough to appal the stoutest-hearted Chancellor of the Edwardian Age. The hearts of ministers must have sunk within them when they found themselves faced with this most unpopular of all tasks. Few of them could have dreamed that their very necessity was destined to be turned to glorious gain, and to provide the means of settling their long overdue account with the Tory Upper Chamber.

By 1909 the Ministry had changed considerably in personnel and distribution of offices since its formation in 1905. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had died in the previous year, and the Cabinet had ceased to be dominated by that tradition of old-fashioned Liberalism of which he was one of the last whole-hearted devotees. His successor was a Yorkshire barrister, Mr. Asquith, a man of far more distinguished talents, but without that instinctive faith in the magic of the Liberal prescription that had inspired C.B. in dealing with the South African problem, and had

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enabled him, during the brief period of his Premiership, to earn the respect—not untinged by affection—of his colleagues and the nation at large. Faith was hardly the quality anyone would have postulated of Asquith. His mind had something more than the dryness that pervades the atmosphere of the courts. He shared the eighteenth-century standpoint that regarded “enthusiasm” as a term of disparagement. He had all the unemotional virtues; he was incapable of petty intrigue, and one of those all too rare politicians of whom it could be said, at the end of a long career, “he nothing common did nor mean.” But he was not of the stuff of which the great believers and crusaders are made. He held a brief for his party, which he could plead with the majesty of a Cicero, but with a conciseness of statement more in the Tacitean vein. And like the perfect advocate he was, he was capable of expressing himself in chiselled English, and yet giving away nothing more than he had intended, even if this involved leaving his audience no wiser than before. It was not altogether by accident that popular tradition came to associate Mr. Asquith’s name with the phrase “Wait and see!” He was in his dry, as Gladstone had been in his expansive, and Balfour was in his somewhat casuistical way, what is known as a great Parliamentarian. How far this phrase may be taken as implying great statesmanship is a matter concerning which every man must be free to form his own opinion.

While Mr. Asquith imparted a conservative and stabilizing force to his ministry, a dynamic influence, not less potent, emanated from a personality in almost every respect the direct opposite of his own, that of his newly promoted Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George. So far from eschewing emotion, this solicitor from Wales specialized in it, and possessed an unrivalled faculty of stimulating it in others. He will probably live in history as among the greatest

passion-compelling orators of all time. To understand his career, it is necessary to consider its historical background of Welsh Nonconformity. The Methodist revival of the eighteenth century had exercised a profound effect upon English life, but Welsh life it had positively revolutionized. For generations, now, the whole life of a typical Welsh parish had been centred in the little Chapel, that had no form nor comeliness, and whose ministers were usually plain working men, appointed by a poor and intensely democratic congregation. Here the lack of colour and ritual was more than compensated for by an oratorical exuberance of successive generations of preachers, who, says Mr. Watkin Davies, in his invaluable account of his native Wales, "brought pulpit oratory to a point that has never been surpassed, even if it has been equalled, by any nation before or since."¹

Hitherto, except when some revivalist like Evan Roberts had caused a nine days' wonder, nobody outside Wales had been greatly affected by what went on within the walls of these obscure Bethels. There is no product of the human imagination so perishable as oratory, and few remember the names of John Jones, John Elias, and Owen Thomas. But now, here was a preacher capable of making the House of Commons his chapel, and, in course of time, the whole nation, from 'John o' Groats to Land's End, his congregation. It was as if the mountains of his native land had been in labour, ever since the first earthquake shock of Wesley's evangel, to give birth to this wizard. His fellow-countrymen were as tinder to the fire of his eloquence, and to the English it was a new and proportionately stimulating phenomenon. It was reinforced by a reckless and defiant courage, that laughed at odds and rose with disaster. There was a quality about this defiance that soon impressed itself on the popular imagination, and caused it to

¹ *Wales*, by W. Watkin Davies, p. 216.

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be whispered, in clipped but horrified accents, that this little Welsh attorney was not quite the gentleman that even a Liberal Minister should be. For, indeed, he had imported into the decorous atmosphere of English politics not only the eloquence but the democracy of the tin chapel. That a Duke should turn as scarlet as his hunting coat and talk to a commoner as if he had just ridden over a hound, might be deplorable, and even provoke some Radical Ajax to defy the thunder—but that the commoner should snap his fingers in His Grace's face and even expand them into a snook, was something that not even the average English Labour Member would have thought in quite the best of taste.

There was another peculiarly Celtic quality by which the new Chancellor was distinguished, that consists in an almost complete lack of what the Romans called *gravitas*. The slow and tedious processes of collecting information, of balancing judgment, and giving its due weight to each of the factors in a complicated problem, that delayed the action of a Balfour, were never likely to cause a moment's hesitation to Mr. Lloyd George. With him to perceive was to feel, and to feel was to rush into action or to overflow in torrents of eloquence. A shrewd judge might have guessed that in fullness of time and under the stress of a great emergency, this man would be the adored ruler of a democratic electorate, when the philosophic Balfour had sunk into a back seat and the unemotional Asquith had been rudely pushed to the wall.

Such was the Chancellor who now had to face the situation created by the sixteen million deficit. For most politicians promotion to the Chancellorship under these circumstances would have seemed about as invidious as that of Uriah the Hittite to the forefront of the battle. But to Mr. Lloyd George's temperament, odds were only a stimulus. It was not

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his instinct to resign himself to making the best of a bad business. With native intuition he had divined one element in the situation that might provide him with the chance not only of getting the money, but also of counter-attacking, with decisive effect, the hitherto victorious Lords. He might have anticipated Foch's famous but apochryphal message by saying, "My coffers empty; the pendulum swinging; I attack with my Budget."

But there is one difference worth remarking—Foch's reported words concerned a life-and-death struggle with a national enemy whom it was his duty to hurl back at all costs and by any practicable means. Mr. Lloyd George was ostensibly trying to raise money for the King's service in the way that would cause least detriment to his subjects. Such a task does not involve attacking or defeating anybody, nor is a Budget normally regarded in the light of a bludgeon for the heads of His Majesty's Opposition. But it was not Mr. Lloyd George who had started the conversion of politics into the skin game. The Lords had been playing it, with the utmost skill and success, for the last three years. It would have taken a statesman of very different calibre from that of the fiery Welshman to have resisted the temptation to let this trump card in his hand

Fall like thunder on the prostrate ace

of the Lansdowne-Balfour partnership.

For there was one weak point in the otherwise impregnable position in which the Lords were entrenched across the path of Liberal legislation. They could throw out any ordinary Bill, but by a constitutional custom older than that which restrained the King from the use of his veto, they were bound to give free passage to a Finance Bill. Now upon finance the whole structure of modern society depended—it would be possible to revolutionize it by finance alone.

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Mr. Lloyd George was no revolutionary at heart, but he realized that he could embody in a Finance Bill measures more acutely distasteful to their Lordships than any of those they had so contemptuously thrown out in previous years, measures whose passing would put them to even greater annoyance and humiliation than they had succeeded in putting upon the Government. That was the least that could happen, but there was just a possibility that the Lords might lose their heads and their tempers to the extent of becoming revolutionaries themselves, and laying violent hands on the Budget. Then indeed they would be quitting the advantageous ground on which they had hitherto been careful to offer battle, and would have delivered themselves at last into the hands of their enemies.

Accordingly the Budget was designed so as to hit as hard as possible at the two interests with which the Tory cause was most closely identified. The landed interest was harried by increased death duties, duties on undeveloped land and minerals, a reversion duty on the termination of a lease, and a 20 per cent levy on the unearned increment of land, a concession to socialist theory destined to prove unworkable in practice. If it was necessary to hit the big landlord, it was still more important to irritate him, and this was effected by a minute and complicated questionnaire which the Chancellor likened to another Domesday Book, but which to the questionees was more reminiscent of the Holy Office. Mr. Lloyd George next proceeded to implement the threat already made by one of his colleagues, to avenge the defeat of the Licensing Bill by "swingeing duties" upon the Trade. And finally, by increasing the differentiation, already made by Mr. Asquith, between income just earned and income derived from the investment of earned or inherited capital, and by imposing a supertax on incomes of over £5,000, the Budget was given a

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mildly socialistic complexion that would put the Lords, if they resisted it, in the light of rich men selfishly defending the privileges of "capital."

Never was net spread with such ostentation, and it might well have seemed inconceivable that the Peers, who had played their dangerous game, hitherto, with masterly discrimination, should now oblige their enemies by perpetrating what was nothing less than a constitutional outrage. But we have seen how the impunity of their proceedings had already caused their lordships to exhibit dangerous symptoms of *hubris*, or, as an undergraduate might have put it, to get above themselves. The penal taxation of whatever profits they still derived from their estates touched them on their most sensitive spot, and having, for the most part, thoroughly John Bullish heads beneath their coronets, they resented the tactics of this Welsh attorney as a deliberate hit below the belt. Old Lord Salisbury and the Duke of Devonshire, had they been alive, would never have allowed the emotions of their followers to get the better of their judgment, and would certainly have perceived that the waiting game was the winning game. But the lack of inhibition, so characteristic of an age of nerves, was as marked in peers as it was in emperors. From its first appearance, the Budget was assailed with an unrestrained violence that would make it very difficult, when the time came, to avoid proceeding to extremities.

This was to play right into Mr. Lloyd George's hands, and he was determined to exploit to the full the folly of his assailants. An admiring biographer has recorded how, when the Liberal Cabinet refused to believe that the Lords would go to the length of throwing out the Budget, "Mr. Lloyd George persisted in believing the contrary. 'They will throw it out all right!' he would always say cheerfully enough; and the only shadow that would pass over

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his face would come when someone would half convince him to the contrary.”¹

The master-stroke was dealt when the Chancellor went down to address an audience of East-enders at Limehouse. He was greeted with tumultuous enthusiasm, and launched forth, whether by premeditation or by the orator's instinct for exploiting to the full the mood of his audience, into an appeal of a kind with which the audiences of Welsh revivals were sufficiently familiar, but which to English ears was something new and irresistible. Reading it even now, in cold print, it is hard not to be carried away by the fiery torrent of such invective as,

“The landlords . . . never deposited the coal in the earth. It was not they who planted those great granite rocks in Wales. Who laid the foundations of the mountains? Was it the landlord? And yet he, by some divine right, demands as his toll—for merely the right for men to risk their lives in hewing those rocks—eight millions a year!”

And so on, with a sustained splendour of imaginative imagery to the peroration,

“Why should I put burdens on the people? I am one of the children of the people. I was brought up amongst them. I know their trials; and God forbid that I should add one grain of trouble to the anxieties that they bear with such patience and fortitude. . . .”

It was no doubt magnificent, but Mr. Lloyd George's colleagues had hardly been prepared for this open incitement to the Have-nots to rise and mutiny against the Haves. However, for the immediate purpose of kindling enthusiasm against the Lords, it was undoubtedly effective—and the morrow could take thought for the things of itself. As for the Peers themselves and their Unionist allies, their fury knew no bounds of prudence. “Limehouse”

¹ *David Lloyd George*, by Harold Spender, p. 102.

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became a term of abuse on a political par with Billingsgate. The order of Dukes emerged from the obscurity which had long enveloped it, and some of its members distinguished themselves by a violence of language that out-Limehoused Limehouse. One noble sportsman even expressed a desire to throw the offending Chancellor to his pack of dog hounds. Another—north of the Tweed—instructed his agent to recoup him for the Budget by refusing a guinea to a football club. The delight of Mr. Lloyd George knew no bounds, and he threw himself with zest into the new sport of Duke-baiting. The aristocracy he compared to a cheese—the older it is the higher it gets. The Peers, whom cartoonists depicted and most city-dwellers visualized as those in the chorus of *Iolanthe*, stood, in this interchange, at the hopeless disadvantage of the important person in a temper.

It is doubtful whether the Chancellor's campaign had such a decisive influence on the electorate as was believed at the time. Such appeals as that of Limehouse have most effect in rousing the enthusiasm of electors who would in any case have cast their votes as far to the left as possible. The men in the middle, by whom the issue of elections is really determined, were as likely to be frightened towards the right as enthused for the left. Whatever points might be scored in the game between the Houses, it is probable that the real dominating factor of the situation had never ceased to be the stolid opposition of the Industrial North to anything savouring of Protection, and that if the Government had gone to the country at any time previously to 1910, the verdict would have been substantially the same as it was then.

The Tariff Reform group, that now supplied the driving force to the Unionist Caucus, was determined to link the fortunes of the party irrevocably to its propaganda. In this it was encouraged—as Disraeli had been in making his appeal to the country in 1880—

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by the results of a by-election in South London. A certain Mr. John Dumphreys, whose most notable characteristic was an enormous pair of what had once been known as Piccadilly weepers, leapt into sudden fame as Unionist and Tariff Reform candidate for Bermondsey. It was perhaps even more his whiskers than his principles that made him an ideal candidate to stunt, but the excitement worked up over the affair in the papers is hard to believe nowadays—one phrase that comes back to the memory, from the most intellectual of all the Sunday Papers, is “the Ithuriel spear of Jack’s common sense.” In spite of the fact that the vote against him was split, the success of Mr. Dumphreys in winning the seat was acclaimed as the beginning of a Tariff Reform landslide, and no doubt had its effect in hardening the Peers to put all to the touch. It is only necessary to add that Mr. Dumphreys’s career as M.P. barely outlasted the end of the year, and that in the General Election his return to his former obscurity passed almost unnoticed.

The Tariff Reformers felt themselves in a real dilemma, because the Budget was meant to demonstrate the possibility of raising money not only for national defence, but for a constructive policy of social reform without resort to import duties. If it were to pass without any openly disastrous consequences, it would be possible to argue that the main prop of the Protectionist case had been knocked away. Thus the purblind arrogance of men to whom politics were only an occasional interruption in a life-long devotion to fox, horse, and pheasant, was reinforced by the insistence of business men in a hurry, and the Peers proved as capable of being stampeded as any other mob. Lord Milner exhorted them to damn the consequences of rejection, and those who counselled prudence began to be despised much as if they were soldiers who funked going over the top. Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Balfour were certainly alive

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to the dangers of the situation, but they probably felt that it was better to put themselves at the head of the mob than to be trampled underfoot in the stampede.

The end came in November, when the Budget at last came up to the Lords, and it was known that the incredible had happened, and the Upper House had decided to violate a tradition that had held good since the days of the Merry Monarch. There was a debate that lasted six days, and a vote that represented quite a considerable whip up of coroneted deadheads, after which a couple of rockets were sent up under Liberal auspices in token of revolution, and the country settled itself down, amid less than the normal excitement, to the business of electioneering.

This election, like the last, was fought in January, and the result was far from flattering to the calculations of either side. Most of the county and residential constituencies, with a goodly proportion of the small boroughs, that had gone Liberal in 1906, swung back to their Unionist allegiance, but the great industrial districts, with the exception of the Birmingham area, remained steady to their Free Trade allegiance. The result was that Unionists and Liberals presented two solid phalanxes of almost equal numbers, and Labour receded by about a fifth from its 1906 high-watermark. This gave a British and Irish-Protestant majority of about 40 for the Budget, one that could be turned into a slightly greater majority against the vote of the Irish Catholics, who were known to disapprove violently of the Budget on account of its licence and spirit duties, and whose leader, Mr. Redmond, had denounced it as violating both the spirit and letter of the Act of Union. Thus if every member had voted in accordance with his expressed convictions, the Budget would have been thrown out on the assembly of the new Parliament, and the action of the Lords to that extent vindicated.

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Nobody, however, was simple enough to imagine that this would be the case.

For now the poison, injected by England into her own veins at the Act of Union, was about to produce its full effects. It was no longer a question of England governing Ireland, but of an Ireland, to which the very name of England was hateful, imposing her own terms upon her oppressor of past centuries. Her policy would be dictated not by any consideration for British interests, but by a cold calculation of her own. She did not care a Wood's Halfpenny whether the Lords had or had not violated the British Constitution—all she minded was that they stood in the way of her demands, and must therefore be rendered impotent. Her demand was for nothing less than Home Rule, a Home Rule that included the subjugation, by British law, and if necessary by British arms, of the Protestant community in the North-East.

That was the stark necessity that stared the British parties in the face. Only by one means could it be evaded, and that was for both to sink their differences in the face of a national emergency, and support an agreed plan for cutting the Irish cancer out of the British political system, without starting the whole tragedy again by reproducing the former relations of England and Ireland in those between Irish Catholic and Irish Protestant. But the rules of the skin game do not allow of such co-operation between the players. The Liberals were too much infuriated with the Lords to forgo the chance that now offered of getting even with them; the Lords were correspondingly embittered against Mr. Lloyd George and his Budget. If it were a choice between giving Mr. Redmond his pound of Protestant flesh, and leaving the Lords with their veto, the Government would not hesitate. And Mr. Redmond, if he had little of the ice and iron of Parnell in his nature, had imbibed enough of his

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master's teaching to see to it that there should be no other alternative.

It took more than a year and a half after the decision, or indecision, of January, 1910, to settle the business of the Lords. If the Budget was a clumsy and largely unworkable piece of finance, the Government's plan for dealing with the Second Chamber was an even more clumsy makeshift, that admittedly shirked what was really the most important element in the problem, that of substituting an efficient senate for a handful of Bishops, law-lords and retired dignitaries, reinforced by a scratch collection of sportsmen and business magnates,¹ most of whom made scarcely the least pretence of attending to their legislative duties. The fact is that the necessities of party warfare, when it has reached a certain stage of acuteness, leave no room for such luxuries as reform on scientific lines. Five-year Parliaments, Single Chamber finance, and an unreformed House of Lords with no moral authority but a legislative veto limited to roughly two years, formed no safeguard against revolution, since any chance majority of the Commons, that really meant business, could within three years of its election repeal this new Parliament Act by its own machinery and proceed to set up Single Chamber Government, or perpetuate any form of dictatorship it chose.² But failing such drastic measures, the Lords, with their powers now defined and unlimited by any unwritten convention, could hamper a Liberal Government to an extent that, before the rejection of the second Home Rule Bill, the Victorian Age had never dreamed of.

After the Irishmen had been induced, in expecta-

¹ It must be remembered that the handle to such a man's name, if achieved and not inherited, was more often than not a certificate of corruption.

² A menace not to be despised, if Continental precedent is anything to go by.

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tion of favours to come, to tilt the scales in favour of a Budget they abhorred, the rest of 1910 was employed in marking time. The crucial question was whether, and under what conditions, the Sovereign would consent, or could be constrained, to break the resistance of the Lords by a wholesale creation of Peers. The death of Edward VII, in the spring, imposed a temporary truce upon the party strife, and there was even talk of a solution by agreement. The new King, George V, was hardly on the throne before he began to put out feelers for a settlement. Partly as a result of an earnest letter of his to the Prime Minister, a joint conference of party leaders was arranged, and hopes were raised that were too bright to be realized. For after all the exaggerated rhetoric that had been used in the course of the controversy, any settlement whatever would have seemed a humiliating surrender to the rank and file of at least one faction, and probably both. So the Government persisted with its Bill, and the Lords formulated counter-proposals whose sincerity was not convincing.

In order that the King's hands might be strengthened, or forced, in applying the necessary coercion, the Government again appealed to the constituencies, and an obviously bored electorate decided in almost exactly the same sense as earlier in the year, and for probably the same reasons, since the Tariff Reform cause had not become any more popular in the industrial districts, and Mr. Balfour's last-minute offer to submit the question to a referendum was too obviously a tactical manœuvre of the kind that the plain man had learnt to expect from Mr. Balfour. No one who understood the mind of the average elector, and its incapacity for concentrating on more than one issue at a time, could have hoped to divert his thoughts to the Irish sequel of the proposed Parliament Act. Perhaps some forlorn hope of regaining its freedom from Mr. Redmond's dictation

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had weighed with the Government in challenging this second election.

The drama of the Parliament Act closed on a note of broad farce. Even the result of the December election could not convince some of the more reactionary peers that the game was up. These Diehards, as they were called, after a famous regiment, loudly proclaimed their intention of holding fast to their principles at all costs and all risks—though the Duke of Wellington, in a precisely similar situation, had counselled surrender, and the personal risks incurred by a tramp through the lobbies seemed hardly commensurable with those, for instance, of Albuera. The leaders of this band of heroes were Lord Halsbury, a pugnacious old lawyer now not far from his ninetieth year, and Lord Willoughby de Broke, who had hitherto been known as one of the sternest avengers of violated hen-roosts that had ever put spur to flank. It soon became known that unless the Act was passed, Mr. Asquith would advise the King to swamp the Unionist majority by a gigantic creation of Liberal peers—the list was actually made out—and that the King would consent. In that case not only Home Rule, but every other measure the Liberals liked to pass, would be rushed through without even the two years' suspension, and the prestige attaching to a title would be debased from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Nevertheless, the Diehards persisted—"and there," to quote the anonymous writer of the epilogue to his autobiography, "sat Willoughby de Broke as calm and collected as though waiting outside a covert for a fox to 'break'." Those among the Unionist leaders who retained some touch with reality, like Lord Lansdowne and Lord Curzon, tried hard to restrain their followers from committing *bara kiri*, but it was doubtful—even after Lord Morley had announced in the most solemn terms that peers could

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and would be created in case of necessity—whether they could hold back Lord Willoughby's field of sportsmen. It was now put about that any peer who "ratted" on the Bill was a mean, cowardly fellow, and the Unionist *Globe* went so far as to express a hope that no man would take any of them by the hand again, that their friends would disown them and their clubs expel them.¹

Up to the very last the issue was doubtful. The Diehards made frantic efforts to whip up the last available peer—it is recorded that Lord Willoughby, having lured one noble duke down to the unaccustomed precincts of the House, endeavoured to keep him there by concealing his hat and coat, but all in vain, for his Grace bolted in what clothes he had left "and was never seen again."² The passage of the Bill was only secured when 37 Unionist peers, and 13 bishops headed by the Primate, actually voted for it, and even then the majority was a bare 17.

¹ *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, by J. H. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Vol. I, p. 327.

² *The Passing Years*, by Lord Willoughby de Broke, p. 303.

BOOK IV PRE-WAR

CHAPTER I SPEEDING UP

The death of Edward VII, on May 6th, 1910, was felt as a personal bereavement by millions of his subjects. They had taken to their hearts the genial man of the world, whose personality most of them had built up in their own minds out of material supplied by the newspapers and the thousand tongues of rumour. But Edward VII had come to stand for something more than the universal uncle he had been on his accession, he had to some extent taken his mother's place as a guarantee of safety, a royal mascot—nothing, it was felt, could go disastrously wrong while he was on the Throne. Throughout the Empire he was known as the Peacemaker, though in Germany he was believed to be a potentate of the utmost cunning and unscrupulousness, engaged in drawing a ring of hostile steel round the devoted Fatherland.

And yet his passing could not be said, like his mother's, to mark the end of an epoch. Edward was dead, but the Edwardian Age had four more years to run, and to run at ever-increasing speed, as if the last brake had now been removed from a car that was already speeding downhill. During these hectic and hustling years, the Throne was no longer occupied by a Sovereign whom even the press could convert into a representative figure of his age. It is true that the unobtrusive sailor who succeeded his father as

George V had, as befitted his profession, travelled widely and taken an active interest in the development of the Empire, but it could not be said of him that he had the essentially modern *flair* for publicity. Edward VII, if he had not been a King, might have become hardly less famous as an actor, so innate was his capacity for getting the spirit of his part across the footlights. But the personality of George V grew into the affections of his subjects by a process more gradual, and, as it were, in spite of himself. An unsleeping consciousness of the responsibility attaching to his position—an inheritance perhaps from his Coburg grandfather—fostered a devotion to duty that was far from reflecting the easy spirit of the age, and on some occasions was an actual handicap to its possessor, as when, during the War, His Majesty set his example against the cult of pleasure as usual, rife in fashionable circles. With what wisdom and tact his duty was performed, and in how much less equivocal a sense than his father George V merited the title of Peacemaker, only time could disclose. It was through his initiative that the attempt was made to settle, by rational agreement, the quarrel between the two Houses, and during the Home Rule controversy, though in a position of extraordinary difficulty, he contrived to work tirelessly for peace without once taking sides with either of the contending factions or overstepping the limits of his authority as constitutional monarch.

One of his first acts displayed a courage not only moral but physical, for he, first of all English Sovereigns, went out to India to assume, with due Oriental pomp and magnificence, his authority of King Emperor, the occasion being used to transfer the capital from Job Charnock's comparatively modern settlement at the mouth of the Hoogly to the sacred and historic city of Delhi—and at the same time to repeal a partition of the Bengal Province by Lord Curzon,

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which, though defensible as an attempt to see fair play between Mohammedan and Hindu, was resented by the Hindu community as an intolerable grievance.

The term "Georgian" was, indeed, applied to a number of mostly young poets, whose work, collected in an anthology, was supposed to be peculiarly representative of the new age, but if the term could have been associated with any monarch, it was certainly not George V, though it may have recalled faint memories of the Prince Regent. Nobody, on the other hand, could have used the terms Edwardian and Victorian, without prime reference to the Sovereigns in question. It might have been said of George V that his was an essentially Victorian figure, and that the spirit of the great Queen would have rejoiced to know that a successor so entirely after her own heart now occupied her throne.

The press dared not, but rumour did its best to give the new King a publicity value in accordance with the last Georgian tradition. It was whispered that he had, like his great-great-uncle and namesake, contracted a secret marriage in his youth, and that Queen Victoria had forced him to substitute a royal for a morganatic consort. All were agreed that the unfortunate lady was the daughter of an Admiral, but at least three Admirals were cited in different versions, some bold romancers even going so far as to make the sinking of the flagship *Victoria* the picturesque device of an aggrieved parent for drowning the old Queen in effigy. Unfortunately a certain obscure Communist was imprudent enough to print a somewhat less lurid rendering, and was brought to book in a manner that rendered it impossible for the most hardened scandal-monger to humanize—in the post-Stracheyan manner—his Sovereign's biography. It is to be feared that the most loyal feeling aroused in many contemporary breasts by this vindication was that of regret for Edward VII. For the English

public displays a curious incapacity to tolerate blamelessness except in its female Sovereigns.

We must picture George V, then, during these first four years of his reign, as standing aloof, with a certain quiet dignity, from their increasing turmoils. On every side the pace of life was being speeded up, even in the most literal sense. By the end of Edward VII's reign, the motor-car was plainly effecting the conquest of the highway. The private car was now part of every rich man's establishment, though as yet its price made it a prohibitive luxury for all but a minority of the middle class. But for the adventurous youth of villadom, there was the motor-bicycle, a fearsome contrivance with a note reminiscent of a machine-gun barrage and prolific of smashes. Already the dignified broughams and victorias, the natty traps and dog-carts were beginning to disappear from the roads, and grooms and coachmen—unless they could turn their hands to the service of the internal-combustion engine—were finding it more and more difficult to get a living. A new type of servant had sprung into being, a man not in livery but in uniform, no longer racy of the stable but knowledgeable of the machine. In the London streets, the horse-bus drivers, a last link with the old coaching days, were ousted by silent mechanics, who no longer chatted with two or three favoured passengers, but sat in strained attention at their wheels, out of earshot. Another London institution that was being swept into limbo was the hansom cab, a somewhat alarming conveyance, whose horses seemed to be perpetually slipping down on the wooden pavements and whose drivers were apt to entertain notions on the subject of fares which they would expound with no lack of candour. But the new taxi-driver had not only his engine driven but his fare fixed by machinery, and even his reaction against the amount of his gratuity had something about it a trifle mechanical.

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A passion for breaking records was a natural accompaniment of the motor age. The new type of popular hero was he who, despising life, could succeed in propelling some kind of machine faster than anybody else had done. A law had been passed restricting the speed of motors to 20 miles an hour, but nobody, not even the magistrate on his way to fine his fellow-motorists, dreamed of obeying it, and it had the effect of enabling the local authorities to levy ransom, as arbitrary as that extorted by brigands, from any motorists who might chance to pass through their police traps. The law was thus brought into hatred, ridicule and contempt; motorists soon acquired the habit of becoming a law unto themselves, and chancing the risk of a fine as of a misfortune equally liable to fall on the just and the unjust. Cars were openly advertised to go at three or four times the speed limit, and owners saw that they got their money's worth. Motor racing was a sport soon imported from the Continent—the Brooklands track was opened in 1907—and the strong spice of danger traditionally welcome to the Englishman contributed in no small degree to its popularity as a spectacle.

The roads, which had gone to sleep since the coming of the railway, had reawoken to crowded activity. Horseless carriages now dashed along them at speeds that rivalled those of express trains, and the rail-less truck had begun to make its appearance. The brief heyday of the bicycle, as a sport and a luxury, was past, though on Sundays there might still be seen occasional bunches of young men, and even maidens, pounding and sweating along, crouched over their handlebars. But the joy of speed was no more for the cyclist when he was liable to be continually splashed and dusted, and occasionally killed, by cars that rushed past honking him indignantly gutterwards. The push-bike was declining to an utilitarian

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conveyance, much employed by workmen in getting to and from their jobs.

The road system was compelled to adapt itself to a volume and speed of traffic for which it had never been intended. Its powers of adaptation were naturally limited. The thing most easily transformed was the surface, and during the early years of the century the alternate dustiness and greasiness of the main highways had been to a large extent mitigated by the practice of tar-spraying. But to widen and straighten the roads, to eliminate the murderous blind corners, and to soften precipitous gradients, was a task that had only just begun to be tinkered at in pre-War days. The situation was worst of all in the towns, where not only was any comprehensive scheme of street widening usually out of the question, but where the congestion and danger were all too frequently enhanced by the shortsighted zeal of municipal authorities in laying down tramlines.

It was not only the road system that was in need of readjustment, but the nervous systems of those who used and dwelt by the roads. Already, before the coming of the motor-car, the conditions of modern civilization had put an ever-increasing strain on human powers of adaptation. But now the barrage of stimuli was intensified to drumfire. The noises incidental to the conversion of roads into speedways called for a corresponding tightening up of the nerves, and the pedestrian, especially in the towns, who wished to preserve life and limb, was compelled to keep his attention continually on the stretch, to practise himself in continual estimates of the speed of fast-approaching vehicles, and to scuttle or dodge for his life as often as he ventured off the pavement.

By the beginning of the new reign, an even swifter mode of transit, and one of far more alarming potentialities, had come into use. Ever since the days of Minoan Crete, the lord of creation had been inclined

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to chafe at his inferiority to the meanest cabbage white or house-sparrow in the matter of flight. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, nothing practical had come of it, beyond the ability to drift precariously about in the cars of balloons. But in more than the literal sense it might have been said that flying was in the air. One of the commonest forms of book about the future concerned the man who had worked out the plans of a completely efficient airship, and thereby achieved power to impose his own terms, or those of the secret society he happened to patronize, on the rest of the species. Meanwhile, numbers of inventors were working out the designs of flying machines that never quite succeeded in flying. Even advanced thinkers were inclined to be doubtful whether anything more than an ingenious toy was likely to be the final product of these activities, and there were still pious folk to deplore the presumption of those who invited the wrath of the Lord by improving upon His plan of creation.

It was the success of the brothers Wright, in 1903, that at last made it clear to the world that the age of flying had actually dawned, and after that progress was astonishingly rapid. So implicit was the faith in any sort of mechanical improvement, that nothing but delighted applause was excited, in 1909, by what might well have been counted for one of the most ominous events in British history. For on the 25th of July Britain ceased to be an island, in the sense of land unapproachable save by water. A Frenchman, M. Blériot, undeterred by the failure of a compatriot a few days previously, succeeded in piloting his monoplane across the Channel and landing in a field near Dover. Henceforth Britannia might lord it as she would over the waves—her iron walls were no protection against an enemy who could fly over them.

The effect upon civilization of transferring war to

a third dimension was hardly guessed at the time, and the breaking of the peace mercifully came too soon for it to be more than dimly foreshadowed even during the four terrible years that ensued. But already it was becoming evident that the aeroplane and airship did not exhaust the possibilities. If iron walls could be flown over for the purpose of laying waste cities, they could be dived under with equally deadly effect against the commerce that kept these cities alive. No less an authority than Admiral Percy Scott, known to be one of the most scientific officers in the navy, was making civilian flesh creep by proclaiming the helplessness of a surface navy against the submarine. Like most enthusiasts for a new invention, the Admiral was inclined, if not to over-rate its potentialities, at least to antedate them, though in the event the submarine just, but only just, failed to bring England to her knees.

The most spectacular feature of these early years of George V's reign was undoubtedly the conquest of the air. In an incredibly short time after Blériot's feat, the sight and sound of an aeroplane had become familiar to dwellers on the route from Croydon to the Continent. Records for speed, height, and distance were continually being surpassed. Stunt flying began to be practised, and the loop was successfully looped. With construction still in the experimental stage, the life of a leading airman was held on the most precarious tenure, but the number of prominent casualties only increased the thrills of this new chase after speed. It is no wonder that Alfred Harmsworth, whom even elevation to the Baronage could not cure of his passion for being ahead of the times, made it his special business to expedite the development of aeronautics with all the resources of his press.

The cult of the thrill followed inevitably from this universal speeding up, and answered to the need for

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some stimulus violent enough to impress itself upon nerves dulled by the bombardment of lesser stimuli. It was not likely that a nice discrimination would be fostered under such conditions. Crude stimuli tend to provoke reactions proportionately crude. A sensational age is likely to be also one of mafficking, of crazes, of panics, and all forms of emotional incontinence.

In every department of life, in politics and journalism, in religion, in art and the employment of leisure, the evidences of this tendency are overwhelming and world-wide during the years immediately preceding the War. It was not by chance that mechanical invention was giving birth to a new form of entertainment that was destined to exercise a profound effect on the popular mentality. This was the moving picture, a hueless dumb-show whose cheapness and popularity led to its being turned, by mass production, to what can only be described as the basest uses.

There had long flourished a kind of popular melodrama in which incident had been so conventionalized and character so simplified as to make it equally remote from life and art. This nobody with the least pretensions to culture had hitherto dreamed of patronizing, but the shrewd business men who were developing the cinema industry instinctively hit upon it as providing the most easily applied formula for the standardization of plots. Crude and primitive as the old Surrey Side stuff had been, the mechanical limitations of the screen play ensured that this should be cruder and more primitive still. Before the post-War advent of the sound film, the persons of the drama were deprived of the gift of human speech, except in so far as the action could be suspended, and printed words projected on to the screen. Thus cut off from the possibility of communicating thought, except by this terribly cumbrous device, and without

even the brute beast's language of a cry, the characters were forced to betray their emotions by an extravagance of grimace and gesture that had hitherto been foreign to the English character. Such limitations would have reduced even Hamlet to the Surrey Side level, and beneath what had hitherto been the lowest deep of melodrama yawned an even lower deep of movie drama.

The world to which the audience was transported was thus one from which intelligence was practically eliminated, and in which character was mechanized into the dominance of some one motive easily understood of the people. Beauty, in this world without colour, was reduced to its lowest form of sex appeal. There remained only emotion, of a necessarily primitive order, finding vent in action. The cinema drama, when it aspired to be serious, was thus melodrama minus dialogue and reduced to its lowest term of thrills—a succession of pursuits, perils, escapades and embraces. A typical motive was for some intensively advertised blonde, with the goggling eyes of desirable maidenhood, to be lured, through the machinations of some persevering diabolist, into various predicaments that in real life could have had no other issue than that of her death by drowning, crushing, boiling, falling, or shooting, but which on the screen were equally certain to be terminated by the intervention of a swain, selected by a process of rigorous elimination as being the kind of lover in whose arms the greatest number of prospective patronesses would like to dream of themselves as being borne to safety. The apotheosis of these fortunate performers, like that of the pagan deities, into stars for universal worship, was already being actively capitalized. There was at least one World's Sweetheart, though—so ephemeral is this kind of fame—one fails to remember what precise title was coined for her opposite number of the male sex.

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The nearest approach to art on the screen was in a few avowedly comic films. Not a little first-class clowning can be accomplished by means of expression and gesture. One enormously successful performer in this vein, Mr. Charles Chaplin, might fairly have claimed to be the Grimaldi of the twentieth century, and to have brought the time-honoured clown, and his predecessor the fool, up-to-date as the *ingenu* in a bowler. But the comic spirit, as Meredith conceived of it, could find no harbourage on the movie screen, for irony or satire without words is not easily compassed. And the ordinary film comic without a Chaplin, a Max Lindener, or a John Bunny, was the crudest imaginable kind of knockabout—in these pre-War days perhaps nine out of ten must have relied for their humour on some form of chase, in which the pursuers, for some reason of technique, would invariably halt at a corner, crouch, gesticulate, and resume motion with one simultaneous jerk forward.

The advantages of the film for educational purposes, for revealing the marvels of science, and for displaying to those who must needs stay at home the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, were seldom exploited, and then only in the most perfunctory way. It was soon discovered that this was not the sort of thing the public wanted, while boys and girls, who did not pay for their own education, created no effective demand for the enlivening of their curriculum, though a well-stimulated juvenile demand for thrills, out of school hours, might have its effect in increasing the supply of criminal, suggestive, or merely inane pabulum to these little ones.

It is characteristic of the film drama that to none of its products was there hope of more than a passing notoriety. None even of the stars who made fortunes, and whose worshippers were numbered by the million, could preserve their creations from the

scrap-heap. They ran their few months' course, harvested their profit, and gave place to later novelties. Revivals were practically unknown. The public interested themselves in performers, but the personality of the dramatist meant as little to them as that of the man who operated the camera. Often there was no dramatist at all, but merely an expert whose business it was to take some novel or stage play and, by depriving it of words and thought, to adapt it for the screen in the form of pure action.

As a mind-forming influence it would be hard to overrate the importance of the cinema. By the time George V ascended the throne, the habit of going to the pictures was already on its way to become universal. Children scrounged the uttermost penny out of their parents for admission to the cheapest seats; young women expected, as a matter of right, to be escorted thither by their suitors; tired housewives snatched a weekly or bi-weekly oblivion of the job that never was done; workers of all kinds found an escape from the monotony of their daily grind, on the prairies of a wilder West than ever cowboy knew, or in the knight-errantry of delivering the only girl in the world from the Cave of Dread, or the path of the approaching express.

The function of the pictures was similar in kind, though more telling by reason of their being directly impressed on the senses, to that of the mass-produced journalism that had followed a universal literacy. They had the fascination, and something of the effect on the mind, of a new drug. They afforded a cheap escape from the reality of a mechanized civilization, to which human mentality had only superficially adapted itself. Somewhere, in the depths of his being, the poor little street-bred person knew that he or she was bored, and perhaps humiliated. That was why, in the nineties, he had waved his paper flag and taken to himself an empire, and why she had dreamed

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of a world peopled by glorious aristocrats whose pleasures one could share in day dreams. Man was a caged animal, fed and cared for to the utmost capacity of science, but pacing feverishly behind his bars and dreaming of open spaces he had never seen. And here in the picture-house was a means of escape more congenial to refined sensibilities than that of the gin palace or opium den.

Readers of Ibsen will remember how, when that most determined of all fugitives from reality, Peer Gynt, escaped into the world of mountain trolls, he was offered the hand of the King's daughter on condition of having his eyes put out, so as nevermore to be disillusioned. That is the condition attached to all such modes of escape—the mind's eye gets dimmed, the mind itself atrophied. Once having accomplished the act of faith implied in this plucking out the mind's eye and casting it from him, the rest was easy for the fugitive. Unlike works of art or the services of religion, the pictures demanded of him no mental effort, no concentration, for their enjoyment. He had not even, as in the bar parlour, to accomplish the possibly arduous feat of conveying the liquor to his lips. He had only to sit still, as he might have in the electric chair, and allow the thrills to be administered. This was education, no doubt—but to what end?

This tendency to eliminate mental effort might have been observed in another form of popular entertainment. The musical comedy, that had held the stage during King Edward's reign, and had incidentally been a means of providing brides for the more susceptible members of the aristocracy, was now being successfully competed with by the revue. Here, in an age of progress, was at least one example of evolution from better to worse. For the predecessor of the musical comedy had been the comic opera, which in the hands of Offenbach, and of the Gilbert-Sullivan

combination, had been a genuine art form, not a few of whose products, like good wine, only mellowed with the passage of years. In the musical comedy, for the witty dialogue and the quite sufficient plot of the Gilbertian model were substituted lumps of conventional padding between the songs and choruses for which the play was an excuse. But in the revue even the semblance of connection between the different episodes was almost, if not quite, abandoned. The playgoer was no longer required to tax his mind with the labour of following even the ghost of a story. He had only to sit still in his seat and allow a series of disconnected thrills to be administered to him.

For one form of emotional stimulus, however, it was at least necessary to keep moving. The country was in the grip of a dancing craze that waxed ever faster and more furious as the pre-War period swept to its close. In the gay days of King Edward the undisputed mistress of the ballroom had still been the waltz, at first chiefly in the Parisian vein of *Valse Bleue* and *Sourir d'Avril*, but later with the light-hearted sensuousness of Vienna, as in *The Merry Widow*. Even if some of the shallow and reckless frivolity of the Viennese spirit may have crept into this later music, the strains were at least those of the European civilization of which Austria had so long been the bulwark. But this was not enough to satisfy the restless spirit of the pre-War years. Not delicacy but strength was what jaded nerves demanded by way of stimulus. And this was to be found in the exotic, the savage, the criminal. There was even an attempt to acclimatize the frankly lustful dances of the Parisian *apaches*, and it was perhaps due more than anything else to the difficulty of the step that it failed to take on, a handicap that also prevented the full triumph of the not dissimilar Argentine tango.

It was to the American negro that the fashionable world ultimately had resort for the satisfaction of an

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unexpressed craving. The history of the negro influence is one that might repay study. The nigger song was popular as early as the sixties—Mr. Gladstone was a particular admirer of *Camptown Races*. Like the child and the foreigner, the negro provoked the laugh of conscious superiority, though, as befitted the romantic spirit of the times, young negresses were granted a chivalrous exemption from the stigma of comicality. On an old screen, dating from the late fifties, there are pasted some lively scenes of plantation merry-making, and it is to be noted that though the swains and matrons are figures of fun, with enormous jutting lips, the dancing girls are shepherdesses or colleens with faces becomingly bronzed.

In the nineties the vogue of the Christy Minstrels had started a rage for plantation songs. In the most popular of these, the amorous motive was more to the fore than that of pure farce. But it was the amorousness of children, naïve and pleasantly ridiculous—it had about it not the least tinge of sensuality. For some mysterious reason, nearly every troubadour of the banjo was expected to address his serenade to a nymph bearing the name of Lulu. And quite funny, in their innocent way, some of them were.

But simple Sambo was no more the typical negro than the Pat of the English comic paper was the typical Irishman. From time to time stories got into the papers of dreadful outrages that had led to even more dreadful lynchings. Sam's amorous nature, it seemed, was rather closer to the jungle than to the nursery. And it was to the jungle rather than to the nursery that the thrill-seekers of the pre-War years instinctively turned. For the first time some of the real negro spirit began to penetrate to England. For the negro, in his native Africa, had not only possessed an art of sculpture, whose merits, thanks to Mr. Roger Fry, were just beginning to win European recognition, but he had expressed himself by a form of music

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which, unlike the sculpture, had survived his transportation into slavery. More, perhaps, than any other type of human being, he had rhythm in his soul, and also in his feet, for even the preachers, who retained the medicine man's art of arousing their congregations to hypnotic frenzy, were not unknown to dance instinctively about the rostrum from which their message was delivered.

It was only very gradually that syncopated ragtime—to give it its pre-War name—came into competition with the European dance rhythms. Quite early in the century a negroid dance called the two-step came in, just as that last relic of Victorian romanticism, the barn dance, died out, and two or three of these would be a feature of the average programme. But the main stress was still on the comic side of the negro character. A great deal was heard, about this time, of cake-walking, a grotesque performance whose practice was not considered entirely refined. The very word ragtime has an unmistakably comic implication. But music has its own way of ignoring definitions, and no censor has ever been able to prevent it from expressing passions that would be taboo in any other medium. In those last hectic days of peace, the walls of the most respectable dance-rooms were beginning to re-echo the tom-tom rhythms of the devil dance, the same rhythms that in black-ruled Haiti had inspired the bloodstained orgies of voodoo, and, in the Southern States, had provided a Christian outlet for passions sometimes not entirely dissimilar.

It is hard to say where the comic ended and the primitive began, but the transition is marked by the gradual supersession of the two-step, with its jerky motion, suggestive of the cake-walk, by the hypnotic rhythm of the one-step, in all the many forms it assumed before, during the War, they were amalgamated under twin designations of one-step and fox-

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trot. Variations were imported from across the Atlantic that shocked old-fashioned people by their frankly sexual intent—the turkey-trot, for instance, and the bunny-hug, in which a modern dancer would recognize the germs of the fox-trot. In these, the man held his partner squarely face to face, instead of partially sideways, an innovation that caused a certain indignant chaperon to remark to her neighbour, at a London dance, “If you ask me, my dear, it’s just embracing each other in the middle of the room,” and the redoubtable Mr. Punch to blazon in a full-page cartoon his desire to kick bunny-huggers. The posture seems harmless enough now, and the more extravagant variations of the one-step were never considered quite good form.

The real significance of the negroid craze lay in its music, and above all in its syncopated rhythm, that differed from the Viennese waltz lilt as neat brandy differs from light wine. Like the tom-toms from which it was derived, it had a hypnotic effect, which was enhanced by the nature of the movement, half-walk, half-shuffle, that it substituted for the dreamy convolutions of the waltz. While it stunned thought, its hammer-like beat did undoubtedly act as an agreeable stimulant on the most jaded nervous system. There was a kick in it such as there had been in no previous dance music. And its tendency was to implant a craving for excitement at all costs, to create that characteristically modern disposition that is bored when it is not being stimulated, and is consequently incapable of reflection or of depth. Thus, with the cinema and ragtime, the city of Mansoul was being assaulted, simultaneously, at Eye-Gate and Ear-Gate—and by the same enemy.

This is not for a moment to deny that the cinema opens a field for creative effort whose possibilities have even now hardly begun to be realized, or that negro music as a mode of artistic expression can be

as potent and original as the corresponding sculpture. But the fate of art-forms, when commercialized, is that of pearls in the pig tub—they do not change their nature, but they may form a very unhealthy diet. This is equally true of the sensational triumph, during these years, of another form of art, whose appeal, to a more restricted public than that of the dance-rooms, lay less in its beauty than in its flamboyant barbarism. This was the Russian ballet and opera, not the least of whose attractions was the riot of colour effects in its costume designing and scene painting, wherein the most vivid of primary colours were placed in a juxtaposition that—almost incredibly—achieved harmony out of discord. The music was but the colour translated, with absolute fidelity, into sound. But it would be absurd to pretend that it was on its artistic merits alone that the new mode achieved success. The attitude of the English public to opera may be gauged by the fact that Mr. Hammerstein's attempt to start a new opera house in Kingsway was a failure from the start—the public preferred it as a music hall. It was even doubtful whether the original Opera House at Covent Garden would be able to pay its way much longer—that it did so was admittedly due to the rich people for whom a box was a mark of social distinction, like a family pew. So that it is not unfair to conjecture that the success of the Russian opera and ballet was, like of the pictures and jazz, that of a stimulus—that its wild, barbaric discords of colour and sound were brandy of a rarer vintage than that patronized by the mob, but brandy, for all that, neat and intoxicating.

On every side, and in every class of society, might have been witnessed this same wild cult of the thrill. Its manifestations were all-pervading, from the apotheosis of sport that made Saturday afternoon an orgy of excitement for crowds sometimes topping the hundred thousand, to the well-advertised extravagances

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whereby the members of a Society, now frankly resigned to plutocratic standards, strove to keep the boredom of their leisure from becoming intolerable. The master thrill-seeker of the time was surely the young baronet who, in order to liven up an evening party of both sexes, jumped in his clothes off a boat into the Thames and was drowned.

That was one of many episodes of the time that seem, in retrospect, to have a strangely symbolic import, as if there was a consciousness abroad that the pace of life was too killing to last, and that those who wanted to enjoy the fruits of civilization must do so in haste, before they turned to ashes. It was a psychologist of genius who thought of adding to the thrills provided by London's stucco elysia one that consisted in smashing, with missiles provided for the purpose, as much as possible of the cheap china arranged on a dresser. The violent destruction of something that appeared useful—and would doubtless have been useful to many a poor housewife—was a luxury worth parting with countless sixpences to obtain. The time was not far distant when it would be possible to have one's bellyful of smashing, and being smashed, with missiles of a different nature.

It was in the early spring of 1912 that the crowning product of mechanical civilization, the vast ship aptly named *Titanic*, left Southampton on her maiden voyage for New York. She was not only furnished with every luxury that science could provide and money could buy, but she was actually proclaimed to be unsinkable. There were millionaires galore among her passengers, as well as that pioneer of modern journalism, and devout worshipper of everything titanic and record breaking, Mr. W. T. Stead. She was safe, safe as the civilization that had produced her, so safe that nobody on board even thought in terms of safety, still less realized that, rather than brook a single hour's delay, the Captain had felt it

his duty to rush her blindly in the dark through a sea infested with icebergs. One of these ripped her open as easily as if her thin plates had been paper, and so gently that her passengers only knew that the throbbing of the engines had ceased and the unsinkable ship lay calmly at rest on a glassy sea. Not long afterwards it began to dawn on them that she had been deemed too safe to make it worth while to provide boats for more than a minority of those on board. And imperceptibly, inch by inch, with her lights blazing and all her splendour intact, the great Unsinkable was settling down in the icy water—not all the resources of science and skill of seamanship availing aught for the fifteen hundred trapped souls who remained after the last boat had pulled away. It is said that some second-class passengers solaced their last moments by occupying the first-class saloon. . . . It was more than two hours before the *Titanic* towered up on end, with her machinery crashing through her hull—and then there was no more ship, but a cry upon the waters that lasted for some ten minutes and faded into silence.

That other unsinkable ship called Civilization had yet two more years to race over smooth waters before her safety likewise was called in question.

CHAPTER II

THE INTRANSIGENCE OF POLITICS

The intransigence that is everywhere the note of these pre-War years is only their thrill-cult in another aspect. Just as hardened drinkers get to taking their spirits neat, and drug fiends to increasing the strength of their injections, so every fresh speeding up in the pace of life creates a corresponding demand for emotional dope, whose supply, by still further jading the nerves, again increases the demand. The most powerful stimulus of all is that of the herd or team spirit. To have a side of your own, to identify yourself with its fortunes, to set it at variance with some enemy, to work up a frenzy of excitement over the vicissitudes of the struggle, and, God willing, to achieve the master thrill of the knock-out, becomes a psychological necessity. Where such opportunities do not exist, they must be invented.

We, who know through what outlet this manufactured energy at length burst forth upon town and countryside, are apt to think that the Englishman's strongest pre-War antagonism was that expressed in the roars of defiance and shrieks of terror in the press, on the subject of the German peril. This is to make the mistake of measuring the intensity of an emotion by the magnitude of its cause. Germany was no doubt always in the emotional field, but except during the great naval panic of 1909 and times of acute international crisis, it was generally in the background, and even the steady undercurrent of fear was too continuous and unvaried to secure emotional precedence. The antagonisms of party, of class, of sex,

and even of sport, could be relied on more continuously to provide those increments of stimulus that the nerves required.

Wherever it was possible to arouse the team spirit, it had to be inflamed to the fiercest heat of antagonism. In the political war, the consciousness, at least on the front benches, that it was a game, did not prevent it from becoming the skin game. Lord Milner's "damn the consequences" might have served for its motto. The Lords had damned them to the point of constitutional revolution; Mr. Lloyd George had countered by fanning the flame of social revolution; and it was soon to become apparent that even civil war was a consequence that could be cheerfully damned by both sides alike. In the daily give and take of Parliamentary life it was more apparent, with every passing session, how woefully manners had declined from Victorian standards towards those of the bear-garden. "Scenes" were of ever more frequent occurrence; they were stunted in the press, and the detailed report of them was received with more delight than what sub-editors thought worth recording of argument or rhetoric. In May, 1905, the Liberals, being then in opposition, had howled down that most inoffensive of ministers, Mr. Lyttelton, and before the final passage of the Parliament Bill, Mr. Asquith was similarly howled down, with cries of "Traitor", by the Unionists. The interchange of abuse and invective of the crudest description became more and more common—even Mr. Balfour once so far forgot himself, at a political luncheon, as to accuse the Lord Advocate of a "frigid and calculated lie"; on another occasion one of the young Diehard hotbloods in the Commons twitted some Labour members with being drunk. This sort of thing, with the row that was sure to follow, was decidedly more to the taste of the time than the old-fashioned set-piece orations.

After the Diehard fiasco in the Lords, it was soon

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evident that Mr. Balfour's days as a leader were numbered. He had certainly been inclined to treat politics as a game, but as a more gentlemanly and intellectual game than many of his followers, and their backers in the press, were minded to play. The stunt press had now so great a power of suggestion as to be able to undermine the authority of the most powerful statesman. This power was now directed against Balfour. A man who could see not only one, but several aspects of a question, who could suspend judgment, and who preferred the rapier to the bludgeon, was not cut out for leadership in a swiping match. One of those thought-saving incantations, which were now essential to controversy, was coined—"Balfour must go", and lest this should put too heavy a strain on the memory, it was shortened to its initials—B.M.G. As Mr. Balfour was not the man to cling to his post in such circumstances, go he did, with his customary blandness and, it may be, a hardly perceptible shrug.

The Unionists were some time in agreeing on a successor, as the two most obvious candidates, being each the choice of a different section of the party, cancelled each other out, and resource was finally had to a certain Mr. Bonar Law, of Scottish-Canadian origin, who was known to be an uncompromising Tariff Reformer with a good head for figures, and whose hard-hitting style of oratory was not likely to be cramped by such intellectual subtlety as that of Balfour. Bonar Law, who was by nature the mildest and most modest of men, proved to be possessed of better qualities than those on whose strength he had been chosen leader, but before the War had sunk the partisan in the patriot, he was regarded, not without admiration, in the light of a Tory Sausage-seller, capable of out-facing and out-Limehousing the Radical Cleon.

A strange light was thrown on the state of English

politics by the great Marconi scandal that came to a head in 1913. In the spring of the previous year there had been a boom in the shares of the English Marconi Company, on account of a Government contract for the erection of an imperial chain of wireless stations. Rumours began to circulate to the effect that certain members of the Government had made a good thing out of their official knowledge by speculating in the shares of this company. This charge, when it was raised in Parliament, the ministers in question had emphatically denied—and with literal truth. But what they had, as it subsequently transpired, refrained from stating, was that they had speculated in the shares of the American Marconi Company, which, though subsidiary to the English, was not directly concerned with the contract, and furthermore, that a substantial amount of the Liberal Party secret funds had been similarly dealt with by the Chief Whip.

The matter was now deemed serious enough to call for investigation by a Select Committee of the Commons. A more farcical body could not have been imagined. The pretence of judicial honour was thrown to the winds, and the members of the committee functioned on strictly party lines, deflected, perhaps, by a fear of reprisals, from too uncompromising a demand for light on matters that both parties alike had an interest in concealing. The Unionist minority drafted a scathing report alleging impropriety, though not actual corruption; the Liberals, on the other hand, professed to regard the whole proceedings as perfectly legitimate and proper; while the Liberal chairman made a solitary attempt to hold the scales even by expressing his regret at the purchase, even in good faith, of the American shares, and at the subsequent ministerial economy of candour.

All ended happily in a debate in which the accused ministers were considered to have displayed a can-

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dour at once disarming and tactful. Their careers were in no way prejudiced, and in fact one of them was shortly deemed worthy of promotion to the highest judicial office. In the light of subsequent events, it may be argued fortunate, or the reverse, that the standards of Mr. Gladstone's day, when Lord Chancellor Westbury had been ruined for a trifling indiscretion, had been relaxed in a more tolerant century. The purist minority, who wanted to probe beneath the smooth surface of politics, as mirrored in the newspapers, was insignificant and powerless in face of the great, complacent public, which was only too grateful for any new thrill, and, having been duly stimulated, would go on to to-morrow's sensation and forget all about to-day's.

Another sign of the times was the increasing disposition to dispense not only with the decencies of Parliamentary life, but with the laws that Parliament passed. This, the principle of the Irish land campaign and the Passive Resistance stunt, was asserted again, on the level of broad farce, when Mr. Lloyd George, in 1912, introduced a scheme of compulsory insurance, on the Bismarckian model, against sickness and unemployment. The Bill, during its passage through the Commons, occasioned a decided, though temporary, setback to its author's popularity, as the English wage-earner still retained enough of his Victorian individualism to resent anything that savoured overmuch of regimentation. The Lords, perhaps chastened into prudence by their *débâcle* of the previous year, stood aside rather sulkily to let the obnoxious measure pass. Not so the more intransigent of their female supporters, who were outraged at the suggestion that they should moisten, with their own proper saliva, the stamps for the insurance cards of their domestics. It was too much! Not all the leagued powers of the State and Government should drive them to this humiliation. They would set a

watch over their tongues and keep the door of their lips. They would brave—if not exactly death—whatever does happen when forms are not filled in. A new kind of stamp-moistener appeared in certain shop windows, fashioned in the image of the Chancellor, with a lolling tongue, and the inscription, “Let him lick his own stamps!” But the enraged mistresses never even got as far as passive resistance. Perhaps the tongues in question had been so desperately overworked in the preliminary stages of the battle, that the additional effort was nothing accounted of when it came to the sticking-point.

It was in the following year that an incident showed how deeply the new intransigence had penetrated even into the fold of the Christian Church. At Kikuyu, in East Africa, a conference had been called representing the various non-Catholic denominations of Christ’s followers, in order to co-ordinate their efforts to fulfil His last command, that the Gospel should be preached to all nations. The various delegates, beside treating each other in the light of colleagues and fellow-workers, had actually knelt together at their Master’s Table. That such amenities could be shared with Dissenters by members of the Anglican communion was enough to rouse the righteous wrath of the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Zanzibar, who thundered a charge of heresy at his brother-pastors of Uganda and East Africa. The opportunity for participating in so glorious a row was eagerly embraced by Anglo-Catholics and Hot Gospellers at home. The best comment on the situation was that of Mr. Will Dyson, then the cartoonist of the *Daily Herald*, who depicted a couple of black chiefs looking at a surging Donnybrook of umbrellas and croziers.

“Ah,” remarks one of them; “a religious difference, no doubt.”

“No, sah!” replies the other, “a religious sameness.”

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A sameness indeed—it was about this time that 610 monks of Mount Athos, who had dared to assert the divinity of their Master's name as well as His personality, were seized upon by the Tsar's soldiers and deported to Russia, with the full approval of the Holy Synod¹—a body whose enthusiasm for persecution was destined to be somewhat cooled in the near future. But then, what mattered a religious sameness in a social order so nearly emancipated from bonds of faith? It was otherwise with a spiritual sameness extending to every department of civilized life.

¹ *Annual Register*, 1913, pp. 338–9.

CHAPTER III

THE INTRANSIGENCE OF CLASS

During these opening years of George V's reign, men who observed the signs of the times instinctively felt that, in the Russian phrase, the sledge of civilization had begun to slide downhill. And there were some, even then, who foreboded not war, but revolution, as the end of the progress. For if the spirit of Bismarck was mighty yet, so likewise was that of Karl Marx, nor was blood and iron Nationalism pushed, by the most ruthless of sabre-rattlers, to the length envisaged by the advocates of class war.

The new spirit was, in fact, beginning to pervade the world of Labour, and to pervade it from below, for—from the extremist standpoint—the career of the Labour Party in Parliament had been something of a disappointment. Steady old Trades Union officials, who had earned their candidature by long years of patient service, were out of their depth at Westminster. Besides, even at this early stage, a fissure was perceptible between this Trades Union section of the party, pursuing limited and severely practical ends, and the high Socialist apostles of Independent Labour. So it came about that Labour in the House came to stand for little more than a detached group of left-wing Liberals. Of the two leaders who supplied its brains, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was fast establishing his right, along with Asquith and Balfour, to the style of a great Parliamentarian, while Mr. Philip Snowden was plainly destined, when John Morley had quitted the stage, to stand without question for the last of the stern unbending Radicals.

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It was among the rank and file that the new spirit of class warfare was beginning to spread. Since the piping times of Victorian progress, prosperity had not gone forward with the sureness that, according to the prevalent faith, it ought to have done. Up to the middle of the nineties, the wage-earner had found his real wages, after allowing for temporary fluctuations, on the up-grade, that is to say, his receipts on pay day would procure for him and his missus more of the good things of life than would have been the case a few years back. But just before the close of the century, the worker discovered that the tide of his prosperity had reached its high-watermark, and that not only did real wages fail to register an increase, but that what tendency could be perceived was towards a decline.

From the middle of the nineties on to the War, there was a gradual and fairly continuous rise in prices. One, and probably the chief, cause of this was the influx of gold into the world's economic system from the South African mines. What this meant for the wage-earner and housewife may best be grasped from the figures given in the *Yearbook of Social Progress* for 1913-14, where it is calculated that the pound of 1895 and 1896 had come to be worth 18s. 5d. in 1900 and had dropped by 1912 to 16s. 3d., "figures which," to quote the appended comment, "are . . . sufficiently serious to account for some of the prevailing unrest."

It is to this day a disputed question precisely to what extent wages rose to keep pace with this rise in the cost of living, but the most favourable estimate does not suggest that the workman could get more for his pay, and it seems that wages lagged—as in such circumstances they are almost bound to lag—behind prices. At any rate, there can be no doubt that this was the impression made on the workers themselves, and that, with the housekeeping bills

going slowly but surely up, it seemed as if times were steadily getting harder. No doubt there were other factors than the value of wages to take into account. In addition to his private earnings the worker drew a steadily increasing dividend from the common stock of society in the form of pure water, efficient drainage, free education for his children, a pension for his old age, and a score of other aids and amenities. But it is hardly in human nature to keep a strict account of such things. For the worker, the acid test of prosperity was the one of wages, that was now beginning to yield such discouraging results.

It is true that the influx of gold had had a stimulating effect on trade. These pre-War years of the twentieth century were, like those of the eighteenth fifties and sixties, marked by mounting and staggering statistics. The combined value of imports and exports topped the thousand million mark for the first time in 1906, and by 1913 they had put on more than an extra four hundred thousand. This was a heavy blow to Tariff Reform propaganda, as it seemed, on the face of it, to stultify Mr. Chamberlain's gloomy prognostications during the opening stages of his campaign.

But there was all the difference in the world, from the wage-earner's standpoint, between this pre-War prosperity and that of mid-Victorian times. Then the workman had been getting something definite and tangible out of progress, more, in proportion, than the ordinary investor, with the interest value of capital on the down-grade. Wages had been rising steadily in nominal and still more in real value, and in consequence, there had never been a time of so little discontent or subversive activity. But in the twentieth century the very spectacle of prosperity added to the worker's discontent. For this time there seemed as if there were something wrong with the working of the social system. The more there

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was to distribute, the less did he, who constituted the majority and bore the burden of production, seem to be getting out of it. By that acid test of real wages, he was actually getting less than before. All these mounting millions, it seemed, must be going somewhere, must be getting collared by someone. Whither, then, and by whom?

The answer is suggested by certain highly suggestive curves traced in the 1911 edition of Mr. Chiozza Money's *Riches and Poverty*, and representing the fluctuations, up to 1908, of profits and wages. Taking the figures for 1900 as having a comparative value of 100, we find that, by 1908, wages have only risen, in nominal value, to 101—a positive drop in real value—whereas profits have gone up to 112½. Or, to look at it in another way, between 1893 and 1908, nominal wages have increased by 12 per cent, and profits by only ½ per cent short of 30¹—which means that the capitalist has managed to get approximately two and a half times the nominal increase of the workman's takings, and, in real values, to get all, or more than all, of whatever increase may have been harvested.

Nor had the workman even the comfort of feeling that booming trade had solved his other pressing problem of finding a secure market for his labour. Before the establishment of unemployment insurance, there are no reliable figures to go upon, but it is admitted that though in boom years, like 1913, the evil was reduced to a minimum, there was always a substantial floating mass of unemployed and unemployable, which, in the inevitable years of depression, might exceed half a million, and which, taking the lean years with the fat, the process of time did not show any appreciable tendency to diminish.

All this, as extremists did not fail to remark, was exactly what Karl Marx had prophesied of what he had called the capitalist system—one class producing

¹ pp. 112-13.

the whole of the wealth, the other netting the whole of the profits, except such a bare residuum as would suffice to maintain the wage-earners in a condition more or less adequate to their jobs.

It must not be imagined that the average British workman was likely to figure out the situation as clearly as this, or to have any particular interest in those who did. He absorbed theory in much the same way as certain primitive animals respond to light, not through the eyes, but by allowing it to soak in diffusely all over the body. There was no market for the Marxian Bible in England, still less was any notice taken of a disciple of his who, in the revolutionary underworld, was known as Lenin. And yet, in 1912, so shrewd an observer as Mr. H. G. Wells could warn his countrymen, in the columns of the *Daily Mail*, that England was "in a dangerous state of social disturbance", that "the discontent of the labouring mass of the community is deep and increasing" and that it might be that "we are in the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war."

This was a grave but hardly an exaggerated estimate of the situation. For while the worker did not excite himself particularly about the right to the whole produce of labour, he was harbouring what, for an Englishman, was the most serious of all grievances—he did not consider that he was getting fair play from his politicians, or his bosses, or even his own class leaders. Parliament, with its great Liberal-Labour majority, talked endlessly of Social Reform; his blood was stirred by Limehouse oratory; visions of "rare and refreshing fruit" were conjured up before his eyes—why should he be a beggar with the ballot in his hand? And yet the result of it all was that times were harder and unemployment just as rife, while thanks to the efforts of the snob press, the spectacle of insolent luxury was perpetually being paraded for his mingled delectation and envy. It was

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quite beside the point to argue that the "cream of society" represented no more than a small minority of the capitalist class—the worker trying to make ends meet on an exiguous pittance was not inclined to draw these fine distinctions.

The just literate town dweller, who peopled his world with the types presented to him by the press, had long ceased to think in terms of reality. By his own class journals the capitalist was represented as a hateful and bloated figure in a top-hat—usually too small for him—and a pair of mutton-chop whiskers. And the frankly commercial press helped on the good work by filling its columns with the filthiest and juiciest scandals in upper-class life that a week's sedulous muck-raking could supply. The spirit of hate was being worked up against the drawers of dividends as it was against the inhabitants of Germany, and how bitter it was can be judged by such contemporary cartoons as those of Mr. Will Dyson.

There is one in which the capitalist is shown playing cards, by drawing aces out of his boot, against a gaunt and starved-looking worker, who is surrounded by a crowd of officers, bishops, judges, and people in top-hats, all covering or threatening him with revolvers. In another, Fat, an alternative name for the investor, is shown frantically urging on Disease, Filth and the police—who evidently come under the same category—to bludgeon a defenceless working woman with a baby in her arms. Most significant of all is a cartoon of the Labour members on their knees in adoration of a top-hat.

There was a feeling abroad, sedulously cultivated, that if the worker wanted to have any chance against the capitalist, he must take his salvation into his own hands. On the Continent, and particularly in France, this new form of class warfare was associated with one of the innumerable "isms" of which modern thought was so prolific—Syndicalism, named after

the French word for a Trades Union, the idea being that the State is, by its very nature, incurably capitalist, and that the workman's whole loyalty is due to his associated fellow-workers in the same branch of industry. The object of each of these syndicates should be to possess itself of all the capital and means of production in its particular domain, and so become a vast, self-sufficing unit, linked in some sort of federation, not too clearly envisaged, with other similar units.

That was what one might call the anatomy of Syndicalism—its method was that of Marx pushed to its utmost extreme of ruthlessness. There could be neither peace nor co-operation nor friendship between master and man—the struggle was one of extermination to be waged by any means that were likely to be efficient. Violence and sabotage and calculated bad work had all their place in the new proletarian militancy, and the ultimate weapon was the General Strike, which, if it could be made properly watertight, would, it was confidently believed, enable the associated syndicates to inherit the earth without further ado.

The spread of the new intransigence to class war in England is signalized by a remarkable strike, in 1909, of a section of the students of the Ruskin, or Labour, College at Oxford, because the authorities were supposed to be contaminated by the influence of the old, and presumably capitalist, university. The rebels formed themselves into a Plebs League, and started a new college, in which there was to be no nonsense about humble, or indeed any, seeking after truth, but in which the course of instruction was to consist of naked propaganda, history and economics being doctored so as to bring them into line with the teachings of Marx, the irreconcilability of Capital and Labour being assumed as a fundamental dogma. This strange college drew a large measure

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of its support from the National Union of Railway-men and the South Wales Miners' Federation.¹

The new gospel was preached first to the young—then, as always, the most promising recruits for a campaign of aggression. Redoubtable evangelists were abroad, the chief of them all being Mr. Tom Mann, who had studied Syndicalism at its French source, and who aimed not only at revolutionizing the Trades Unions, but even at transferring the allegiance of the common soldier from his King to his class. But the young men were not young enough to start being revolutionary. Even the children must be captured for the new movement, and for them there was the Socialist Sunday School, wherein little comrades might be suffered to come unto Marx.

The rapidity with which the propaganda of class war was beginning to infect Labour is not to be wondered at, when we consider that it was only the spirit of the time blowing where it listed, and driving masses of men like leaves before the first winter gales. It was not only the stern materialists of the Plebs who felt and fanned this spirit. One of the most interesting literary phenomena of these years was an attempt to revive the Romantic spirit in a consciously unromantic age by the brothers Chesterton and Mr. Hilaire Belloc. These gentlemen combined a cult of Christian orthodoxy and all things traditional with a militancy as rowdy as that of Mr. Kipling. The word "sword" exercised an extraordinarily stimulating effect on their emotions, and Mr. Belloc, who had besides imported from his native France and romanticized for English consumption a cult of Jew-baiting, was hardly less susceptible to the charm of the stake, if we may judge by such rousing refrains as,

Thank the Lord for the temporal sword,
And howling heretics too!

¹ *A History of British Socialism*, by M. Beer, Vol. II, p. 353.

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while Mr. Chesterton was capable of writing one of his finest sonnets in denunciation of a popular leader who had succeeded in avoiding a strike at Christmas, the resumption of tools being described as "the sheathing of a thousand swords," and the sextet rising to the solemn conclusion that "such men as we" would be "nearer Bethlehem," lying

Shot dead on scarlet snows for liberty,
Dead in the daylight upon Christmas Day!

an awful but sublime spectacle, calculated, like the appearance of the Boojum, to evoke

A torrent of laughter and cheers.

What it amounted to was an attempt to create an emotional atmosphere in which the unsheathing of swords (by which convenient euphemism such varied activities may be covered as the slaughter of millions by mechanical weapons and a persuasive tap administered to the skull of a blackleg) is a noble and a sacred thing in itself, and to evoke a vision of Christ Swordsman cheering on Peter to have another whack at Malchus and fulminating woe unto the meek and the peacemakers—because they shall be called the poor in spirit.

These Neo-romantics, or Christian comedians, though they had all the intransigence of Syndicalists, had no direct influence on the Labour movement. Their propaganda of distributionist individualism was regarded, if at all, as a bourgeois fad. Their most important work was the chivalrous but hopeless campaign they waged with the object of exposing the true and inner workings of British politics and their linkage with cosmopolitan finance. But the public had no ears for such exposures. It followed the fortunes of its political as it did those of its football teams, and wanted no spoil-sport to animadvert upon the origin and financial backing of its champions.

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Besides, Mr. Belloc's Jew-baiting invective—which its most prominent victims are said to have regarded with an appreciation characteristically Jewish in its detachment—and his holy zeal to let the Catholic dogs have the best of it on every possible occasion, were bars to his being taken seriously—and in politics Mr. Belloc wielded the most incisive pen of the trio.

The young bloods of the Labour movement were out after very different game. There was no romance about the Marxian or syndicalist propaganda, which was frankly materialist, and aimed at appropriating all there was to be got out of the capitalist class. It was the now universal skin game as played between class and class to the inevitable end, which was the ruin of all parties alike.

The years just before the War witnessed an outbreak of strikes on such a scale as had never been seen before. A new element had entered into the warfare which was thoroughly in harmony with Syndicalist aims. It was realized that in certain essential services it was possible to aim a strike not only at the bosses, but at the whole community. A railway strike could create a sudden paralysis of economic life, a coal strike an even more deadly creeping paralysis, and a strike at the docks something like a food blockade—while all three combined might come not far short of applying that Syndicalist panacea, the General Strike. Such pressure might at least be relied upon to cause a Government, and particularly a Liberal Government, to intervene on the men's side.

The railwaymen were the first out, in August, 1911. This strike was largely the result of the new militant element among the rank and file forcing the hands of the leaders. It started after a number of local outbreaks, at what—though the country had no inkling of it—was a moment of acute peril, for, thanks to the Government's policy of backing French ambitions in Morocco, England was trembling on

the brink of a war with Germany, and the mere fact of the railway system being paralysed might have proved an irresistible temptation for the militarists at Berlin to stake everything on the chances of a surprise blow. After only three days of a stoppage that was by no means complete, a desperately anxious Government, thanks largely to the persuasive eloquence of Mr. Lloyd George, succeeded in getting the men back to work on a basis of complete reinstatement and the appointment of a Royal Commission to settle the points in dispute. This was proclaimed by the leaders as a complete victory, but the Commission's findings granted a good deal less than the full extent of the men's demands, and it was accordingly alleged that the leaders had been duped by the wily Chancellor, or had sold the pass to the enemy. And though there was no fresh strike on the railways, feeling among the men was more bitter than ever.

Next year it was the turn of the miners and the London dockers. The miners who, owing to the unique and dangerous nature of their calling, formed a community marked off with peculiar sharpness from the general body of the nation, were now beginning to organize themselves into the revolutionary spearhead of the Labour movement. As the miner was a trained specialist, whom it was impossible to replace, it was a matter of the greatest difficulty for even the Government to exert pressure on him. The creeping paralysis dragged on through the month of March, and the Government hurriedly rushed into law a Bill which conceded to the adult miner his demand for the lordly minimum of 5s. per day. Even so the men, whose fighting spirit was not to be appeased by anything short of full surrender, balloted against a resumption of work, and were only got back to the pits by the decision of their leaders to ignore anything less than a two-thirds majority.

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The dockers' strike, which took place during the summer, was an ignominious failure, and was marked by a spirit of uncompromising bitterness on both sides that left no room for such a reasonable solution as had secured the docker his tanner after the historic struggle of 1889. The new spirit was voiced by a prayer in which the dockers' leader, Mr. Ben Tillett, who had helped organize that former strike, exhorted an audience on Tower Hill to join with him in the fortunately unanswered prayer, "O God, strike Lord Devonport dead!" his Lordship, a Liberal tea-importer recently added to the nobility, being head of the Port of London Authority. There was also a fracas with the police in Hyde Park, a scrambling affair, considerably exaggerated in the press, of men who looked too pinched and miserable to do any effective rioting, and who were, in fact, being starved into surrender as surely as any besieged city.

The next year, 1913, was marked by a perfect fever of strikes, a particularly shocking case being that of the Dublin transport workers, which would have been more properly described as a sympathetic lock-out, engineered by the employers with the deliberate object of smashing a Trades Unionism as uncompromising as themselves. There was great distress, and rioting of a far more serious nature than the Hyde Park kind, with the Royal Irish Constabulary charging the crowds and breaking the heads of everybody, guilty or innocent, who came within reach of a truncheon. The spirit of class solidarity was infectious, and both strikes and lock-outs were showing a tendency to spread, like diseases, or like the wars of nations, in which one petty quarrel was liable to set the world aflame. Even the children were not exempt, and a touch of comedy was imparted to the situation by a strike of pupils in a Cheshire village school, with due accompaniment of

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processions and banners, in order to secure the appointment of a popular headmaster.

A more serious phenomenon was the beginning of negotiations between the Mining, Railway, and Transport Unions for a great Triple Alliance, whose combined action would be capable, it was believed, of bringing economic life to a standstill. If the war peril from Germany delayed much longer to materialize, it seemed quite on the cards that it might be forestalled by revolution.

CHAPTER IV

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In October, 1905, an incident occurred whose significance was little appreciated at the time, but was destined to prove the *casus belli* in a happily unique form of conflict. The Conservative Government was visibly tottering towards its fall, and Sir Edward Grey, who was marked out for high office in the now inevitable Liberal Government, was expounding the policy of his party in his usual style of dignified restraint. All proceeded with the expected decorum until question-time, when two young women in the audience arose to ask what the policy of a Liberal Government would be on the question of votes for women. To this seemingly legitimate query no answer was condescended. One of the two then jumped on a chair to repeat the question, and at the same time unfurled a little cotton banner with the device "Votes for Women". She was dragged down amid an angry hubbub, and though her companion repeated the question, still no notice was taken. A good-natured Chief Constable tried to smooth matters over by suggesting that the question be sent up in writing to the platform, which was done, but by what seems a strangely impolitic discourtesy, still no notice was taken, and Sir Edward—who, by the way, was himself a believer in women's suffrage—rose to reply to a vote of thanks. His questioners, who refused to be thus put to silence, were now man-handled by stewards and policemen, and dragged from the hall. One of them, a young law-student called Christabel Pankhurst, finding her

arms pinioned, spat—though not, as her sister records, in a very realistic manner¹—at an inspector, an action that, apparently to her surprise, was considered unladylike. And while Sir Edward was giving a tardy explanation of his reticence . . . not a party matter . . . the two irrepressibles were achieving arrest by haranguing the crowd outside. In default of paying the trifling fines imposed, they elected to go to prison, and there they were treated as if they had been the lowest of criminals. The press was frankly contemptuous, and the general verdict was “serve them right.”

It is a counsel of worldly no less than of heavenly wisdom to agree with your adversary quickly while you are in the way with him—and quicker still while you are in the way with her. To treat women who asked for a vote with open contempt and violence was to fan a long-smouldering grievance into a flame of revolt.

That remark of Sir Edward Grey's about the vote not being a party matter did, in fact, put the grievance in a nutshell. The high hopes aroused in the early seventies of a concession of the franchise to women had been utterly disappointed, and in a way that must have seemed peculiarly cruel, since, by the time Gladstone's Reform Bill was introduced in 1884, a majority of Members of Parliament were definitely pledged to the principle. But Gladstone, that man of strange inconsistencies, happened to be just as unfriendly to the rights of women as he was to those of Egyptians. And once he had decided to keep the women out of his Bill, his followers, to the number of over a hundred, repudiated their pledges with the most complacent cynicism. They had, in fact, never harboured the least serious intention of being bound by them. They had promised the vote as a nurse might promise a fretful child the moon, to put it in a good temper.

¹ *The Suffragette Movement*, by Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 189.

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Feeling in both parties was too divided and lukewarm on the subject for it to have any chance of becoming practical politics. And there the matter rested, and seemed likely to rest, till Doomsday.

That a Tory Government should refuse to interest itself in the proposal was by no means surprising. The Tory does not start from the rights of men or women in the abstract, but from a desire to get the country governed in the best possible way, and it might be argued, with consistency, that to flood the franchise with women was neither good for the nation at large nor for the women themselves. But it is difficult to see on what grounds a Liberal, to whom political freedom is a sacred thing in itself, can deny it to one half of the population, unless, indeed, on the Mohammedan assumption that the charming creatures are not possessed of souls.

As a matter of fact, even in the *fin de siècle*, the emancipation of women in other directions had not progressed far enough to impart the necessary driving force to the agitation for the vote. The immense majority of women were still of the home, womanly. Even such distinguished members of the sex as Mrs. Humphry Ward and Mrs. Sidney Webb publicly proclaimed their belief that the emancipating process had reached the limits imposed by the physical constitution of women.¹ Queen Victoria would have liked to see ladies who agitated for the suffrage whipped—a curious attitude in one of the most masterful of English Sovereigns.

But in the Edwardian period, the emancipation of women was proceeding with giant strides. The argument about physical constitution was less obvious, if not necessarily less cogent, now that women were taking to sport in good earnest, blossoming out into golf and tennis champions, and riding in point-to-points. The ties of home and chaperonage were

¹ Quoted in *The Cause* by Ray Strachey, p. 285.

ceasing to bind now that girls could get about all over the country on their bicycles, and the better off among them were driving their own, or their parents', cars. A new type of suburban young woman, greedy for life and crudely rebellious, was depicted by Mr. Wells in his *Ann Veronica*.

The evidence of feminine dress is significant of the direction in which things were tending. The Victorian era had been one that, throughout all its changing fashions, had recklessly sacrificed health and freedom to the cause of sexual selection. Chinese ladies, who crushed their feet, had done themselves less violence than their European sisters, who had jammed the most vital portions of their anatomy into steel frames. Emancipation in a crinoline or a bustle was almost a contradiction in terms.

It was in the nineties that the first signs of a new era began to be apparent. It is true that girls still prided themselves on their wasp waists and wore skirts that scraped up for home consumption a street dust still largely composed of horse-droppings. But the influence of sport and the bicycle were now beginning to tell. The crinoline and bustle were gone for ever, and a new era was inaugurated by the adoption of the skirt and blouse principle. There was even a tendency for costumes to become aggressively masculine, though by what seems a feminine instinct for selecting the most inconvenient parts of men's attire, the uncomfortable straw hat and the throat-constricting collar, with a stiffening of whale-bone, came into vogue.

In the early years of Edward VII's reign it seemed as if the object of fashion were to adorn an orgy of plutocratic extravagance. Not even in the nineties had dresses carried such flamboyant ornamentation. It was the era of the Gibson girl, a magnificent animal, frankly sensuous and without the least pretence of the old Victorian bashfulness. Corsets were becom-

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ing less ferocious, materials less stiff, and the opportunities for unhampered exercise more numerous. A new feature of costume in the twentieth century was its adaptability. The dress was suited to the occasion, and while that for "best" or ceremonial wear clung to its Victorian femininity, that for sport or outdoor exercise showed a progressive advance towards freedom of movement.

From about 1907 onwards, the new-born emancipation of Woman began to be unmistakably expressed in her clothes, despite the naturally reactionary bias of the fashion designers. The simple and straight lines of the classical style that had prevailed in the early nineteenth century, perhaps the most graceful of all English modes, made a brief reappearance, and the neck was freed from its garotte—in fact the ladies had here a distinct advantage over their menfolk, who merely mitigated the tyranny of their own collars by lowering and occasionally softening them. Following on the Grecian came the Oriental influence, largely the result of the Russian ballet, and indeed, shortly before the War the London streets were enlivened by a procession of hired women dressed in baggy silk trousers called harem skirts. But this last effort was a little too advanced even for the twentieth century, and though Eve might, for a brief moment, borrow his pannier from the donkey, she drew a firm line at the breeches of Adam.

There was, indeed, a vogue of what was known as the hobble skirt, a garment that was held up to copious ridicule in the comic papers, where it will be seen depicted so tight that any lady who wanted to catch a train would have had to proceed, like the Devil through Athlone, by standin' leps. This is to judge a fashion by the few vulgar people who attract attention by exaggerating it. The ordinary hobble skirt was by no means without its advantages, for while it restricted movement very little, it was,

beyond precedent, light, and comparatively short. And it was itself transitional, for before the War it was reinforced by a short overskirt, of which the pannier was an exaggeration, and finally, during the War, was scrapped altogether, leaving the overskirt to develop into the short skirt of post-War emancipation.

In function, Woman was advancing even farther than in dress. In the early twentieth century the Victorian taboo on any paid work but governessing and nursing as unladylike had ceased to bind. Young women from the suburbs were beginning to flood the hitherto closed precincts of the City. The invention of the typewriter created a scope for feminine office work. It was a strange sort of emancipation, considering that most of the work apportioned to women in offices was a mechanical routine that afforded incomparably less variety or scope for the imagination than the business of running a home. It was not from among office girls that successors to the Brontës and Jane Austen were destined to arise. But a sense of independence was no doubt stimulated.

Everywhere women were invading fields hitherto the monopoly of men. Local government was thrown open to them, both as voters and as representatives. They were entitled to degrees at the Universities—Cambridge remaining a last stronghold of male privilege. Women magistrates and women mayors had made their appearance by the time of the War. It was obviously but a matter of time before the last barriers of sex disability were destined to be thrown down.

And yet, as far as Parliament was concerned, the situation seemed to be one of permanent deadlock. The woman who wanted a vote, and had heard her M.P. blandly declare himself in favour of giving it, might have been excused for coming to the con-

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clusion that she had as much chance of getting chocolate from an empty slot machine as of obtaining redress of her grievances from the Mother of Parliaments. The matter was one that cut across the ordinary lines of party division, and passions were strong enough to make it impossible for any Women's Suffrage measure to be included in a ministerial programme without splitting the Cabinet and dividing the party against itself. As in Gladstone's day, there were not lacking Members who gave lip homage to the principle, in the consciousness that any measure in which it was embodied was sure to be talked out or blocked. Last, but not least in importance, Mr. Asquith, soon to become Liberal Prime Minister, was among the most determined opponents of the women's claim to equal citizenship.

So it came about that even a Liberal Government could only inscribe "full speed ahead" upon its banners, with a saving proviso that Liberal principles did not apply to women.

There were, however, two things that the politicians, who imagined that the suffrage question could be shelved indefinitely, had not taken into account—one was the spirit of the times, that could inspire Eve no less than Adam, the other its embodiment in the Pankhurst family.

Emmeline Pankhurst was the widow of a Lancashire barrister of what, for his time, had been very advanced views, and who had been a determined advocate of women's rights. She herself had developed a passion, and something of a genius, for political agitation, which she had been able to communicate to her three daughters, and most of all to the eldest, Miss Christabel, of whom, according to the second daughter, Miss Sylvia, in what is likely to be the classic history of the Suffragette movement, the mother was wont to say, "We are politicians, Christabel and I. Christabel is a politician born!"

in the sense that she would never, like most women, be deflected from her purpose in life by her affections.¹

Agitation was, in fact, almost a necessity of life to temperaments so constituted. One of the many revealing incidents in Miss Sylvia's singularly candid account is where Mrs. Pankhurst, in 1906, had come from Manchester with the express intention of creating a disturbance in the House of Commons, and having been persuaded with difficulty from carrying it out, wept bitter tears, like a child denied some promised treat. "You have balked me—both of you! I thought there would have been one little niche in the temple of fame for me!"² Eight years later, when militancy and martyrdom were at their height, we find Miss Christabel writing,

"The militants will rejoice when victory comes . . . and yet, mixed with their joy will be regret that the most glorious chapter in women's history is closed and the militant fight is over—over, while so many have not yet known the exaltation, the rapture of battle."³

Or as Nietzsche might have put it, the Pankhurst gospel was hardly so much that a good cause sanctified militancy, as that a good militancy sanctified the cause.

That this is no distorted estimate is plain from what happened as soon as the outbreak of the War compelled even the Pankhursts to turn their energies into other channels than that of agitation for the vote. The W.S.P.U., their own militant organization, now become patriotic, "rushed," as Miss Sylvia puts it, "to a furious extreme, its Chauvinism unexampled amongst all the other women's societies."⁴ Mrs. Pankhurst and her eldest daughter were now agitating for the war to be carried on with the most uncompromising ruthlessness, and in fact, Miss Christabel's organ, *Britannia*, rose to such ultra-patriotic tantrums

¹ *The Suffragette Movement*, by Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 192.

² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 587.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 593.

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as to bring upon it the attentions of the police. The second daughter discovered a cause fit to be sanctified by the good militancy, not in Chauvinism, but in Communism.

It would be less than the truth to liken the tactics of the Pankhursts to those of Parnell. Even the Uncrowned King, being a man, was not capable of abandoning himself so unreservedly to the quest of All or Nothing. Even he was not so utterly incapable of compromise or half-measures. And it is hardly conceivable that he would have not only given his body to be tortured, with sickening reiteration, as part of his plan of campaign, but have inspired the whole body of his followers to offer themselves for such an ordeal as the merest matter of course. For when Woman is possessed by the spirit of intransigence, she yields to it, as lover or criminal, in self-sacrifice as in absence of scruple, with a logical consistency quite beyond the scope of the male.

Militancy was in the air ; it was driving the world to suicide ; but there was something about this female militancy that makes it differ from the rest as alcohol differs from wine. The suffragette agitation, that special creation of the Pankhursts, may have been comparatively insignificant in its results—it is at least doubtful whether it hastened by a day the concession of the vote—but as a sign of the times its importance can hardly be over-estimated. The male militancies went about clothed in diplomatic forms and sentimental rhetoric, but this flaunted itself naked in all its unreasoning and uncompromising ruthlessness. These women would have the vote, have it on their own terms, dare everything, stick at nothing, to get it. Every other consideration should be subordinated to this one end, and not only foes, but even friends who did not go to the uttermost extreme of their own intransigence, should be crushed without mercy.

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Such was the force that the delays and shifts of the politicians had called into being. For even the Pankhursts would never have got a start for their campaign unless they had had a genuine grievance to work upon. Whether the vote was a good thing or not, nothing could excuse the way in which it was conceded in principle but denied in practice. Still less was any valid defence capable of being put up for the arrogant and even brutal way in which women, who petitioned for citizenship, were suppressed as a nuisance. It should go hard, but the women would better the instruction of the politicians.

The W.S.P.U. was already in being when Miss Christabel Pankhurst had been flung out of Sir Edward Grey's meeting and into prison, so that she and her mother had already an instrument with which to carry on the war that the Liberal stewards had begun. From that moment, till the outbreak of an even greater war, they never looked back or deviated one hair's-breadth from the principle of Clausewitz, that war is an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfil our will, violence without ruth or limit, but applied by them with a quite un-Clausewitzian finesse.

For the Pankhursts were past-mistresses in the essentially modern art of advertisement. Violence, to be of use, must be spectacular. A noble army of martyrs required the support—eagerly conceded—of a less obviously noble band of photographers and reporters. Riot, or even crime, must be carefully thought out in advance with a view to its publicity value. The suffragette must be perpetually stunting the Cause—chalking on the pavement, chaining herself to grilles and railings, hurling herself to death under the hooves of a horse, no ordinary horse, but the King's horse, at the Derby—this last an unauthorized effort promptly turned to account by a spectacular funeral. All was grist that came to the advertising mill.

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The violence of the suffragettes was cumulative. It was their plan of campaign to allow the politicians to fill the cup of their grievances, before their own ruthless counter-offensive was launched. At first, their attitude was that of citizens deprived of their just rights, and agitating for redress. Like the widow in the parable, they would keep on petitioning the unjust judge in season and out of season. They refused to take "No" for an answer, and still more did they refuse to be put off with no answer at all. Undeterred by the fate of Miss Christabel and her comrade, they began to make themselves a thorough, and a calculated, nuisance at political meetings. When the Prime Minister refused to see them, they encamped on his doorstep. When Members of Parliament began to talk and laugh out the Women's Suffrage motion, in the time-honoured way, they protested shrilly from the gallery, and were found to have chained themselves to the invidious grille behind which lady spectators were compelled to sit. When they were forbidden to present a petition to the Commons, they tried to force their way through a cordon of police, and persisted in their efforts until they got taken into custody. In all this they were playing skilfully for the sympathy of a public that, though it might be shocked at their unwomanliness, rather admired their pluck.

As the Pankhursts had no doubt anticipated, the politicians played straight into their hands. They made the fatal mistake of despising their opponents, and showed that, like the Bourbons, they had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Suffragettes continued to be flung out of meetings, and when, in default of paying fines, they went to prison, they were denied the privileges of political offenders, and their martyrdom, which lost nothing in the telling, was advertised with consummate skill. It was not the only thing that was advertised, for the light of

publicity was at last thrown upon the cynical expedients by which Parliament had contrived to shelve the whole business of the suffrage. A plain "No" would have been more honest than the putting up of some licensed bore to orate until it was too late to take an honest vote. As an alternative to severity, members and ministers would try to put the ladies in a good temper by a pose of sympathy, of the kind that had been so freely volunteered for decades. The Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, all smiles and geniality, received a deputation of suffragettes, professed his entire sympathy with their cause, explained how impossible it was for him to take any official action about it, and innocently suggested that they should go on pestering. He little dreamed how literally his advice was destined to be taken!

The Pankhurst plan had the simplicity of genius. All depended on one single assumption, namely that, whatever happened, the Government would never dare to allow any suffragette to die on its hands in jail. Granted that, it would be possible for a mere handful of women, under autocratic control, who were ready to suffer everything and stick at nothing, to create such a reign of terror and misrule as would force ministers and public to concede their demands as the only way of ending an intolerable situation. The law they could set at defiance—it might torture them, but it could not suppress them.

They had calculated, and calculated rightly, on being able to command a kind of passive heroism peculiarly feminine. Before the prison doors should fly open, a prolonged agony might have to be endured that to most men would be more bitter than death itself, and this ordeal might have to be faced again and again. But no less cheerfully than women incur the pains of childbirth, did these termagant enthusiasts volunteer again and again for martyrdom. Few indeed were there who hung back or were afraid.

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It soon became apparent that the suffragettes intended to place themselves completely above the law. At first they contented themselves with refusing to be fined or bound over, and treating the courts, as they had treated the police, with contemptuous defiance. Then the method of the hunger strike was evolved. The women would refuse food in prison, and give the authorities the choice between letting them out and seeing them starve to death. As the second alternative was ruled out, it seemed to follow that no sentence of imprisonment could last for more than a few days, and that a suffragette who did not object to this somewhat drastic method of slimming was free to commit practically any crime she pleased.

But the authorities were not yet disposed to admit themselves checkmated. As the suffragette outrageousness increased and feeling grew more bitter, it was resolved that if the prisoners would not take their food, it should be administered to them by force, through a tube. There was nothing in this operation that need have been more than uncomfortable—one of the successive Home Secretaries, Mr. Herbert Gladstone, actually submitted to it—provided only that the victim remained passive. But this was just what the suffragettes made it a point of honour to refuse, and by their own struggles they could turn it into an unspeakably painful and disgusting assault, which might, if repeated often enough, leave the victim a bodily and even a mental wreck. These grim happenings, which were accorded full publicity, were too much for the refined sensibilities of a public that, if it tolerated cruelty, at least insisted that it should not, as in a tougher age, be obtruded on its notice. Except for a minority of Sadists, it was not pleasant to think of girls and matrons being tortured—or even torturing themselves—on a point of principle.

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And yet, what were the unfortunate ministers to do? They were certainly not of the stuff of which tyrants are made, and if the ladies had only consented to show the remotest glimmering of a compromising spirit, would have been only too glad to end the nuisance by bidding them go away and sin no more. But it was part of the Pankhurst plan that there should be no escape short of absolute surrender. And for surrender the ministers were not prepared. Apart from the fact that to yield would have meant splitting the party, the humiliation of having been publicly henpecked into submission would have been too intolerable, and the Pankhursts were not the women to refrain from rubbing it in. The very violence of suffragette methods was having the effect of stiffening up the masculine will to resist. And Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's successor in the premiership, Mr. Asquith, was about the most unfortunate choice, from the suffragette point of view, that could have been made, for though a professed Liberal, he was not only opposed to their claims, but combined a native obstinacy with all a lawyer's skill in the avoidance of being cornered.

But what could he or any man do to break this amazing determination, short of grasping the nettle and making it clear that the King's ministers were determined to maintain his laws, and that if any rebel pushed defiance to the point of suicide, die she must, and her blood be on her own head? But it was by no means certain that death would do any more than torture to discourage these women . . . the prospect of victim after victim slowly starving was not to be envisaged. And so, at last, a Cat and Mouse Bill was passed, empowering the authorities to let out hunger strikers and take them back to prison, as soon as they had recuperated, for another bout of starvation or forcible feeding. But the comparatively small band of militant suffragettes displayed a capacity

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for endurance that rose superior even to this ordeal. The "mice" were no sooner out of prison than they started to commit fresh and worse outrages. The alternative was presented, more sharply than ever, of a martyr's death for the suffragettes or surrender for the ministers.

But still, beyond the fact that Votes for Women had now been stunted into a political issue of the first importance, there was nothing tangible to show for all this amazing campaign. The politicians, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts with each successive plague. The 1906 Parliament passed without anything being done. In the short-lived Parliament elected in January, 1910, a Conciliation Bill indeed passed its second reading by a substantial majority, but the indomitable Asquith took care that it should not get the necessary facilities for passing into law. In the next year, another Parliament gave a second reading to the same Bill by an even bigger majority, but with precisely the same result, and in 1912 it executed a complete *volte face* and threw out the Bill by a majority of 14. Meanwhile, a Reform Bill had been promised on the basis of an extended male franchise, with the proviso that a free vote might be taken on the question of its extension to women, but when, in 1913, this amendment came to be moved, the Speaker, to the surprise of everybody and the consternation of many, ruled it out of order, with the effect of wrecking the entire Bill.

Thus the suffragettes found themselves, in spite of all their efforts, completely baffled, and baffled by the same maddening devices that had held up their cause for so many years. This had the effect of making them throw the last vestiges of restraint to the winds. The W.S.P.U. had hitherto been under the joint control of the Pankhursts, mother and eldest daughter, and the Pethick Lawrences, husband and wife. But even the Pethick Lawrences were

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not prepared to go to all lengths, and so the Pankhursts were left in undisputed control of the campaign during the last two hectic years before the War. Their followers now transformed themselves into a band of furies, determined to terrorize the country into surrender by doing all the mischief within their power. Senseless and cruel mischief much of it was. One device, capable of inflicting untold suffering on innocent people, was the attempt, happily seldom crowned with success, to destroy letters in pillar boxes. Another was the disorganization of the fire-fighting services by the giving of false alarms. The lust for destruction, characteristic of the time, was glutted to the full. Nothing was spared. Women went about with hammers in their muffs to smash the windows of inoffensive tradesmen; *petroleuses* crept about the country under cover of night to fire unoccupied houses. Rick-burning, formerly punishable by death, came back into fashion. Every sort of public building or sports pavilion was liable to attack. There were pathetic scenes, as when one poor woman, whose means of livelihood had been destroyed by the burning of a tea pavilion, wept in court, unpitied by the champions of her sex. Nothing was sacred, not even works of art—one woman did her best to destroy the Rokeby Venus—not historic relics, for an attempt was made to blow up the Coronation Chair at Westminster. God's House was no more revered than those of His creatures—churches were burnt down, and sacrilege piled on arson.

No considerations of justice or charity restrained these furies in their treatment of individuals. Cabinet Ministers, even those who were favourable to the cause, were dealt with as if they were noxious animals, to be attacked at sight. A hatchet was thrown into Mr. Asquith's carriage; Mr. Harcourt's house was set on fire; Mr. Birrell was mobbed in St. James's

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Park and badly mauled ; Mr. Churchill was attacked by a male supporter with a whip. One poor doctor, whose unwelcome duty it had been to administer the forcible feeding, and who had admittedly performed it with all possible humanity, was savagely attacked with a sjambok. Even the King was not exempt ; he was pestered and insulted, and could not go to the theatre without the performance being interrupted by cries of " You Russian Tsar ! "—a view of his functions that perhaps accounts for the additional cry of " Give women the vote ! " Miss Christabel having decided that " the royal name and office " were " dishonoured ", the unfortunate Monarch was sentenced to receive the treatment of a Cabinet Minister.¹

By this time the suffragette autocracy had begun to be exercised with an arrogance that even the most intransigent of potentates or conquerors could hardly have equalled. Miss Christabel, directing the movement from her safe headquarters at Paris, while her mother endured a ghastly succession of hunger strikes, proclaimed that the W.S.P.U. was not even prepared to receive communications from Ministers, and that militancy—which was now a euphemism for organized crime—would go on until the desired Bill, having passed the Lords, had become an Act of Parliament :

" No militant will believe a single word that the Government may say. No militant will trust a single promise that the Government may make. Then down with negotiations ! " ²

Substituting " Germans " or " Allies " for " Government ", this would have served—though with hardly quite such naked brutality—to have expressed the spirit of any one of the militant patriotisms during the now imminent World-suicide.

¹ S. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

² *Ibid.*, p. 584.

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It was the war workers, and not the suffragettes, who at last made the granting of the vote inevitable, and when it did come, it made little appreciable difference to anybody except the leaders themselves, who, having secured their niche in history, found their occupation gone, and the fickle limelight directed elsewhere.

CHAPTER V

IRELAND—THE BARGAIN

Napoleon is said to have ascribed his ruin to the Spanish ulcer. It might have been said, with even more obvious cogency, that the Irish ulcer was the ruin of the English Parliamentary system. Gladstone's word picture of Ireland standing suppliant at the Bar, and imploring for her freedom, shows how little he had grasped of the real case for Home Rule. The gift, when it did come, was thrust upon Ireland by a distracted and exhausted England, only too glad to rescind that fatal Union on any terms that she could obtain. It would have been well for her could she have anticipated that freedom by a good half-century.

More effectively than the suffragettes had Ireland played the part of Israel to the British Pharaoh. So long as John Bull hardened his heart, and would not let his neighbour go, so long had he continued to be plagued. The prestige and worth of Parliament had suffered irreparable injury from the wrecking tactics of Parnellism. The great Liberal Party had been torn asunder and condemned to twenty years of impotence from its failure to grapple successfully with the Irish problem. Worse was to come—it was to sell its soul, and to the consequence of such a bargain no time limit is fixed.

John Bull was less fortunate than Pharaoh, for that monarch had got a fairly united Israel to deal with, and his letting one nation go would not have involved the driving out and enslavement of another. But it was the crux of the Irish problem that Ireland was not one nation but two, and that the Protestants of

the North-East were one of the most fiercely self-conscious communities in the world, invincibly determined that under no circumstances whatever would they submit to the yoke of a Catholic majority whom they hated with all the unbending intolerance of Calvinism, and whom the traditions of a ruling caste had taught them to despise. Gladstone might have been excused for forgetting Ulster in 1886, for he was, in Lord Randolph's brutal phrase, an old man in a hurry, and Ulster had not had time to show her hand. But now only a blindness so wilful as to be little short of criminal could ignore the fact that no Government could impose Home Rule upon a United Ireland, without undertaking the conquest of the Protestants by force of arms—no ordinary conquest, like that of Poland or Egypt, but the employment of British troops to drive men who professed allegiance to the Crown, and would fight under the Union Jack, under the yoke of England's avowed enemies, men who had but recently shocked the Commons by their vociferous cheers for the news of a British disaster and the capture of a British general.

The Ulster Protestants were not exactly ideal candidates for the rôle of the lamb in the fable. They were inheritors of a bitter and intolerant tradition, and for any freedom except their own they had no hankerings whatever. Their attitude to their Catholic neighbours was expressed in the good old Orange refrain, "Croppies, lie down!" and in fact there was an exuberance and ingenuity of offensiveness in their songs and toasts that it would take an Irishman not only to invent but to appreciate. What a world of religious and patriotic insult is packed into four words—to be sung on the anniversary of the Boyne—

Slitter slaughter! ¹
Holy water!

¹ The correct spelling, I believe, is "slither slather".

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and what a toast of genius is that to the memory of William III (not forgetting Oliver Cromwell), one of the mildest of whose passages runs :

“And may all the Croppies be rammed, slammed, jammed and damned into the great gun that is in Athlone, and may I be standing by with a lighted torch to blow them in innumerable fragments over the Hill of Blastation. . . .”

The conclusion that might have been drawn from these and similar outpourings was that it would be stark madness to endeavour to force people so minded under the heel of an Irish Parliament with a permanent Catholic majority. It was certainly in glaring defiance of the most elementary dictates of Liberalism, whose very name is freedom, and one of whose corner-stones is the principle of National self-determination. To tell the Protestants that they must accept a servitude quite as repellent to them as a negro supremacy would be to Virginians or Georgians, simply because a composite majority of a British Lower Chamber had been whipped up three times to legalize it, and that, in case they refused, they would be treated as rebels, was to read the Liberal Pater-noster backwards, and to inscribe on the banner of freedom the motto of George III, “Rebels must be made to obey.” A middle party, with only its principles to depend upon, that is guilty of such apostasy, can hardly avoid signing its own death-warrant.

For a party Liberal in nature as well as in name, the Irish problem presented a supreme opportunity for statesmanship. To give freedom to the Catholics without taking it away from the Protestants was a task of infinite delicacy. There was overlapping of boundaries ; there were minorities within minorities ; if there were two nations in Ireland, there were also two imperialisms, Orange and Green, neither of which would be content with less than the whole island. Only with liberty as a goal, and unswerving impar-

tiality as a guiding principle, could complexities so formidable have been straightened out.

But an impartial solution was no longer practical politics. Liberalism itself had ceased to be free. The two elections of 1910 had produced that fatal situation that the Act of Union was from time to time bound to produce, in which the Irish held the balance between the two English parties. They had only to vote according to their convictions on the Budget, and the triumph over the Lords, which the Liberals now had in sight, would be exchanged for one of the most humiliating fiascos in political history. And for more than a year after the passing of the Budget, John Redmond, by his mere fiat, could have presented victory to Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Diehards.

There was never a less appropriate candidate for the rôle of tempter than this singularly attractive Irish gentleman. He had, in his nature, none of the cold steel of his lost leader, Parnell. He was more of a lovable than a great figure. But as Irish leader he had no choice. He must sell his support at a price, and that price, as every Irishman knew, was an undivided Ireland. In other words, the Protestants must be forced under the yoke of a Dublin Parliament—nothing less could be nominated in the bond. Unless the Protestants bowed obediently to that yoke—and the Boyne was more likely to flow back to its source—a Liberal Government, with British bullets and bayonets as its final argument, must be prepared to make rebels obey.

In what form the bargain was concluded, whether it was ever formulated in set terms or merely took the form of an honourable understanding, is a matter on which no certain light can as yet be thrown. But that the Irish, when they voted for the Budget and the Parliament Act, did so in the assurance that the price should be paid, there can be no doubt what-

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ever. They held the best of all guarantees for fulfilment in their power to hurl the Government from office at any moment they chose. That the Liberal Party chiefs seriously faced up to the prospect of conquering the Protestants is less than probable. Sufficient to the day was this business of the Lords; the morrow could take thought for the things of itself. No doubt things would work out somehow right. There might be riots in Belfast, not unprecedented but a little worse than usual . . . a few score broken heads, perhaps a death or two—but civil war . . . the idea was too preposterous in the twentieth century! Perhaps, if the worst came to the worst, the Nationalists could be bilked.

Formally or not, the pact was concluded. The Irishmen swallowed the bitter pill of the Budget, and tramped with a goodwill through the lobbies to settle accounts with their old enemies, the Lords. The next year, 1912, the Liberals duly prepared to honour their side of the bargain, and bring in a Bill subjecting Ireland to a Catholic majority in time to secure the benefit of the Parliament Act.

We must now take a brief retrospective glance at the progress of Ireland since the collapse of Gladstone's second attempt to carry his project of Home Rule. The avowed intention of the Unionists was to maintain firm order, and at the same time to kill Home Rule by kindness. It was their theory that the Nationalist agitation only thrived on economic misery, and that a prosperous Ireland would be a contented Ireland. Accordingly they did everything they could to push forward a constructive policy of reform within the limits of the Union. The great standing grievance of an alien garrison of landlords was marked out for removal. First a generous measure of local self-government was conceded, and then, by that romantic Adonis, George Wyndham, Mr. Balfour's Irish Secretary, a Bill was brought in to buy out the

landlords by a State-aided system of land purchase, and to put the Irish small farmer in possession of Irish soil. The bottom dog of all, the hired labourer, was by no means always a gainer by having exchanged Squire Log as a master for Farmer O'Stork, but for all that, it was perhaps the wisest and most successful contribution that English statesmanship had as yet made towards the betterment of Ireland. At the same time the co-operative movement, fathered by Sir Horace Plunkett, was doing wonders to bring prosperity to the Irish countryside. The end of the Unionist regime saw Ireland in the enjoyment of a measure of tranquillity that would have been unbelievable in the eighties, and of a visibly increasing prosperity.

Unfortunately the idea that Ireland, or any other nation, will cease to be patriotic merely because it is well off, is a materialist illusion characteristic of the modern age. England, with her experience of Indian and Egyptian nationalism, ought to have known that it is just when men wax fattest that they are most inclined to kick against an alien domination. What the Unionists had, in fact, done, was to pave the way for Home Rule and render it inevitable. Wyndham himself was half-conscious of this necessity, for he lent an ear to his Under-Secretary, Sir Anthony Macdonnell, and Lord Dunraven, who had already helped him devise his scheme of Land Purchase, and now wished to follow it up by entrusting certain limited powers of administration to an Irish assembly—rather a glorified County Council than a Parliament. But at the very rumour of such an innovation, the spirit of intransigence was aroused. The Protestants were instantly up in arms. In the inclusion of the North-East they saw the thin edge of the wedge of conquest. Poor Wyndham, who had committed himself less deeply to the proposal than was imagined at the time, found his position impossible and had to

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resign. The Nationalists, for their part, proved equally uncompromising when, in 1907, the Liberal Government tried to produce such a measure as the Protestants had anathematized. For both sides, it was evidently all or nothing, a fact that ought to have been a warning to the politicians.

So far from being killed by kindness, the self-consciousness of Irish patriotism had been finding new and significant expression in literature. The Irish language, which had almost died out among the people, was studied and—as far as might be—revived, though no amount of schooling was ever likely to bring it back into common use. The ancient Celtic legends were rediscovered, and Mr. W. B. Yeats became the founder of a new school of Irish poetry and drama. As in the days of Grattan's Parliament, Dublin became a centre of culture, the heaven for a galaxy of stars. But it was a highly romanticized twilight that these first revivalists peopled with the creatures of their imagination. Mr. Yeats was more of an English Romantic than a Celt—the cloud shadows among which he loved to move were those of Shelley, and as a technician he owed not a little to Rossetti.

The authentic spirit of modern Ireland could never be captured by one who averted his eyes in horror from

All things uncomely and broken,
All things worn out and old.

This was reserved for the sombre and ruthless genius of J. M. Synge, who burnt out the brief flame of his life among peasants and vagrants, and who shrank from nothing. The sensitive patriotism of Dublin was outraged when the Abbey Theatre staged a play—a consummate work of art—of which the whole point is the spontaneous hero-worship accorded by the population of an Irish village to a wandering

youth who pretends that he has killed his father. It was the merest cant to explain away the whole affair as one of art for art's sake. With visionary insight, Synge had divined how deeply the iron of past oppression had entered the Irish soul. Another visionary, an unfrocked priest of Mr. Shaw's creation, could cry out, in the bitterness of his soul, that Ireland was hell. But it was a hell, an Irishman might have added, whose fires England had kindled, and might yet set her own house in a blaze.

The Liberal Government of 1906, with its vast majority, was delighted to be free from the troublesome necessity of paying for its existence by a Home Rule Bill. That cause was notoriously unpopular with the electorate of the larger island, and excited little spontaneous enthusiasm in the ranks of the party. The last Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, had gone so far as to disavow it openly. But though the Irish were, for the nonce, impotent—and Mr. Redmond was not the man to revive Parnell's tactics of obstruction—it was advisable to do everything possible to keep them in a good humour. The choice of Mr. Birrell for the Irish Secretaryship was no doubt inspired by the belief that his reputation as a humorist would endear him to what John Bull knew of the Irish soul.

Mr. Birrell set himself, with his expected geniality, to reverse the policy of the Unionists. There was to be no more coercion, the law was to be allowed to function as it did in England. This, in a country where the law meant Dublin Castle, and the whole population was in league against it, was at least a dangerous experiment. It is not to be wondered at that there was a widespread revival of agrarian crime, and that the practice—often revoltingly cruel—of cattle-driving flourished with impunity. The romantic soul of Mr. Chesterton burst into song when some cattle were stopped at a village bearing the suggestive

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name of Swords. But more dangerous weapons than swords were being encouraged under Mr. Birrell's auspices. For an Act of Mr. Gladstone's Government, passed in 1881, which allowed the authorities to control the importation and sale of arms, was suffered to lapse. Not only Catholics, but Protestants, were now free to provide themselves with what was unhappily the most congenial means of settling Irish differences. Never had dragon's teeth been sowed with such amiable light-heartedness.

Nevertheless, the state of Ireland, at the beginning of 1912, was at least an improvement on the bitter times of Parnell's agitation. Under Mr. Wyndham's Act the land had been rapidly passing from English into Irish hands, and the alien rule at Dublin Castle was more than ever an anomaly. Home Rule, that had come to seem almost a mirage, now appeared a political certainty. The price had been paid, the Lords humbled, and the long-promised Bill was due in the coming session. Nothing could shift the Government, with its hundred and twenty majority, from office, until, by the mere mechanical process of voting, the Bill had been forced into law some time in 1914. The fact was also noted by the Protestants, to whom it seemed that the thing that they had greatly feared was at last about to come upon them.

With what fire the Government was playing might have been apparent from an incident that occurred early in the year. Mr. Winston Churchill, newly transferred from the Home Office to the Admiralty, proposed to come to Belfast and deliver a speech, in favour of Home Rule, in the Ulster Hall. It was Mr. Churchill's own father who had invented the slogan that had now been adopted by the whole Protestant community—"Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." That the son should come for the express purpose of pleading what the father had thus characterized as a *casus belli* was regarded as an intoler-

able provocation. An abstract love of free speech had no part in the Ulster Protestant mentality. It soon became evident that any attempt to use the Hall for this purpose would set the whole city in an uproar. Nor was the hated minister likely to escape with his life from any attempt to transfer the meeting to some other part of the Protestant quarter. It was finally arranged that he should speak in a marquee on a football ground in the Catholic quarter. Even so, a force of some 4,000 troops had to be imported, at great public expense, to protect Mr. Churchill from the fury of the Protestants. He was mobbed and hooted on his arrival and at his hotel by an enraged mob, and had to escape from the town by a circuitous route. English public opinion, that little understood the fierceness of the passions aroused, was not unnaturally shocked at such methods of controversy, but to any responsible statesman it ought to have been evident that men who could not even tolerate the mention of Home Rule within their confines were not likely to submit, under any circumstances, to the thing itself.

During this month of February, 1912, the Cabinet was anxiously debating on this very question of whether to allow counties with a clear Protestant majority to contract out of the Home Rule Bill. But Asquith had arrived at a solution highly characteristic of his legal mind. He would not embody Exclusion in the Bill, but would keep it in reserve for use as a bargaining counter. The Bill itself must be one for the coercion of the Protestants, but the Nationalist leaders must be warned, in Asquith's own words, that "the Government held themselves free to make changes, if it became clear that special treatment must be provided for the Ulster counties" ¹—a beautifully elastic formula. And so the Bill was drafted and introduced, bristling with qualifications and safe-

¹ *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, Vol. II, pp. 14-15.

guards, but simple in one essential respect, that it ignored altogether the separate existence, and denied the freedom of choice, of the Ulster Protestant community. The decree had gone forth : the Protestants must submit, or . . .

It soon became apparent what the alternative was likely to be. Sooner than lie down before the Croppies, the Orangemen—and some of them were quite open about it—would have preferred any alien rule, not excepting that of a Protestant Kaiser. If England were wantonly to cast them off from her allegiance, the cry might yet be raised, “ To thy tents, O Ulster ! Now see to thine own house, Guelph ! ” They were at least enough of Irishmen to harbour undying memories—there should be another siege of Derry and another battle of the Boyne before the Protestant boys would pass beneath the yoke.

They had found a leader of like spirit with themselves. Sir Edward Carson, a Dublin Unionist, was, like Asquith, a barrister, and probably the most powerful advocate at the Bar. But he was a lawyer of a rather unusual type, for part of his very strength as an advocate was derived from a sombre fire of conviction, almost of fanaticism, that never ceased to burn. The greatest of all his triumphs had been his duel with Oscar Wilde, when he had been briefed as counsel for Lord Queensberry in a famous libel action. Then all the light shafts of wit that had set the court in a roar, again and again, at Carson’s expense, broke against the remorseless purpose of a moral crusader, determined to purge Society from the abomination of sin. By that time Carson’s reputation had already been built up as Crown Counsel under Mr. Balfour’s regime of coercion. Here, too, he had pursued one undeviating course with an entire absence of fear or sympathy. The law should be enforced, though Parnell and the Land League should raise all Hell to defeat it. Courage—sheer physical courage—is a

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quality that never fails to command respect in Ireland, and when Carson had calmly walked through the midst of a mob that was waiting to tear him to pieces, not a hand was raised against him. It was by the same instinct that the Protestants realized that in this man, with his heavy, remorseless features, they had found a leader after their own hearts, in whom was no compromise nor shadow of turning.

While Home Rule was being slowly forced through the Commons, passions that had long been smouldering in Ireland burst into flame. A Protestant Sunday School excursion was mobbed by a Hibernian procession, and in revenge the Protestant workers in the Belfast shipyards fell upon their Catholic mates, and drove some two thousand of them out of their jobs. Not only were two Irish nations in being, but they were visibly drifting towards a state of war.

CHAPTER VI

IRELAND—THE COVENANT

On Ulster Day, September 28th, an event occurred whose solemnity ought to have impressed the most unimaginative. As the culmination of a series of great meetings, a Solemn League and Covenant was drawn up, which, by November, was destined to obtain 471,414 signatures, 218,206 being men of Ulster.¹ In this document—as signed by the men, the women merely pledging their support—the Covenanters undertook to “use all means that may be found necessary” to defeat the attempt to set up a Home Rule Parliament, and to refuse to recognize such a Parliament if it was set up. Its most remarkable feature, in an age that had long become accustomed to separate religion from politics, was its solemn appeal to “the God whom our fathers, in days of stress and trial, confidently trusted.” This, on the lips of the Protestants, was no empty verbiage. Their God may not have been essentially different from the old Sinai Storm-God—but He was a living God, mighty to save His servants who put their trust in Him. Those who went to Ulster at this time came back with one tune ringing unescapably in their ears—“O God, our help in ages past!” Sir Edward Carson well knew how to appeal to his fellow-Protestants when he publicly branded anyone who should be false to the Covenant with the guilt of the traitor Lundy.

This warning might have been sufficiently dramatic to have given pause to those who proposed the sub-

¹ *Annual Register*, 1912, p. 211.

jugation of the Covenanters. But in the atmosphere that prevailed in England before the War, their instinctive reaction took the form of the laughter that has been likened to the crackling of thorns under pots. The Covenanters, whose sense of humour was not of the strongest, symbolized their will to resist by the display of dummy rifles, and even of wooden cannon. The Government press henceforth could dismiss any suggestion of serious difficulty in enforcing Home Rule with a stock taunt about wooden guns. The Catholics, who knew better, but were no less proficient in the art of insult than the singers of "Boyne Water," ridiculed Carson as the "King of the Bluffers." The mention of civil war was strictly taboo in Home Rule circles—the word invariably employed for any possible resistance to the Bill was "riot", a hole and corner affair, it was suggested, that would easily be put down by the police. Every form of ridicule was lavished on the Covenanters. It was openly flung in their faces that they had no stomach for fighting. The effect on these grim and fanatical, but by no means thin-skinned individuals, can be imagined.

Meanwhile, how was the other great party in the State, Unionist by its very name, reacting to the crisis? In the confusion of principles that prevailed, the Unionists can scarcely be said to have cut a more creditable figure than their opponents. For as surely as the Liberal gospel is one of freedom, so is the Tory tradition wedded to order. Whatever the provocation, it is hard to imagine the Duke of Wellington—let us say—fomenting rebellion as part of a political game. That the Unionists should move heaven and earth to prevent the contemplated outrage on the smaller of the two Irish nations was their manifest duty, but it was none the less their duty to take a wider view than could be expected of the victims themselves. Their leaders knew—none better—that

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the country might at any moment be plunged into the greatest war of its history. Never had the need for national unity been more pressing. The mere threat of civil war might be fraught with terrible consequences; the reality might paralyse Britain's sword arm in the hour of life or death for her Empire.

But the new Unionist leader, Bonar Law, had Ulster blood in his veins, and had superseded Mr. Balfour for the express purpose of gingering up the fighting spirit of the party. That spirit was already quite sufficiently aroused. The Diehards of the county sets were burning to avenge the humiliation of the Parliament Act and to get even with "that fellow Lloyd George," who was now obliterating the memory of the Marconi episode by stumping the country with propaganda of Land Reform. What to them, or to the hard-headed business men of the Tariff Reform campaign, were the liberties of Irishmen? They were out to defeat Home Rule altogether, and to bring down the Government with it.

In this they could claim to be at one with the Covenanters themselves. Sir Edward Carson and his followers scorned to limit their aims to the mere exclusion of the North-East, but were determined that not a single foot of Irish soil should be ruled by an Irish Parliament. Liberty was no more enough for them than it was for the Catholics. The God in whom they trusted to deliver His people would also subdue the heathen under their feet.

Thus, in the controversy that followed, the Unionists, by their indiscriminate championship of Protestant liberty and Protestant ascendancy, actually threw away the strongest part of their case. Just as the Liberals stultified every argument for granting self-government to Catholics by coupling it with the coercion of Protestants, so the Unionists reversed the process, and of the two rival absurdities it would be hard to say which was the more glaring.

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The Unionists, then, could hardly claim to be disinterested champions of liberty when, two months, even, before the Covenant was signed, Bonar Law announced that there were no lengths of resistance to which Ulster might go in which she would not be supported by an overwhelming majority of the British People—as plain an incitement as could have been imagined to armed rebellion. And yet, by a significant inconsistency, no one of the Unionist leaders went so far as to take a definite pledge to repeal the Home Rule Act if the party came into power, or even that part of it that referred to the North-East. They so far misconceived the situation as to offer to abandon their championship of the Protestants, if a definite verdict for Home Rule was attained at a General Election, as if the Covenanters would, for a moment, have admitted the right of a British majority to put them under the Catholics!

The session had been prolonged into 1913 before the Bill came up to the Lords. Had that House been really independent, it might have retrieved its reputation for statesmanship by an amendment securing that the Protestants should come in of their own free will, or not at all. Such a compromise, securing justice, and no more than justice, might well have been accepted after a more or less prolonged haggle, to secure a peaceful passage for the rest of the measure. But the Lords, acting as the obedient satellites of the Unionist caucus, decided on unconditional rejection, and the slow process of the Parliament Act was necessary to break down their resistance. This was to give the Covenanters a space of two years in which to organize.

It was soon evident that they meant to take full advantage of this respite. With menacing deliberation, the work of organization went on, and within a year of the signing of the Covenant, the dragon's teeth sowed by the Government had borne fruit in

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a drilled and disciplined army of something like 100,000 men, commanded by a distinguished officer of the regular army, Sir George Richardson. Meanwhile, the Ulster Unionist Council, under the presidency of Sir Edward Carson, had constituted itself a Provisional Government, to take over the administration of the Province on the passing of the Home Rule Bill.

By the autumn of 1913, the alarming nature of the situation could no longer be disguised. The pretence that the Protestants were merely bluffing had worn so thin as to be transparent. The peals of mocking laughter now had an increasingly hollow ring; lips that had curled with scorn were beginning to foam with anger. Instead of bluff and wooden guns, the talk—strange on Liberal lips—was now all of rebels and treason, and of the authority of the State that must be maintained at all costs. These were brave words, but meanwhile a strange paralysis had seized upon those in whom that authority was vested. Here was civil war being openly prepared within the limits of the United Kingdom. Sir Edward—still characterized as King Carson, but without the addition, “of the bluffers”—lost no occasion of proclaiming that the Government was afraid to interfere and did not dare to arrest him. Mr. Asquith’s attitude to the challenge only differed from that of Dogberry in its unruffled dignity—Mr. Will Dyson depicted him as walking along with a grimace of agonized indifference, while his tormentor plastered him with mud. The official reason for this inaction was the unwillingness to add another to the list of Irish martyrs—a point shrewdly insisted upon by Mr. Redmond. It might have been added that it was more than doubtful whether any jury, except one openly packed, could have been induced to brand the most persuasive of all living advocates with the guilt of treason.

Every month of impunity for this new Uncrowned

King and his legions deepened the conviction in Unionist circles that the Government had shown the white feather, and would never dare to undertake the coercion of the Covenanters. It followed that if a sufficiently impressive show of resistance were only offered, the whole Home Rule edifice would collapse and bury the Government beneath its ruins. Civil war, which was a matter of deadly earnest in Ireland, was, in the country houses and villas of England, a new and thrilling game, with just the right spice of vicarious danger. Few people in England, on either side, seriously imagined that it would come to the reality of men shattered and mutilated, of towns stormed, of the King's troops firing on the Union Jack and loyalists on the King's troops. The Irish Secretary, who had been especially witty about the religious squabbles of Ulster, birrelled happily about "our horrible artillery." In a spirit of equal light-heartedness, sympathizers in country houses began preparing to do their bit for Ulster when the clash came. The inevitable Lord Willoughby de Broke, undeterred by his annihilation in the last ditch of the Veto defences, continued his Diehard career with an assurance that if the worst came to the worst Ulster should not stand alone. There was even a little playing at soldiers in parks, and arrangements were made to accommodate the women and children of Covenanters in the field.

An ominous, but almost inevitable feature of the agitation, was that the willingness of the army to serve against the Covenanters was called in question. It is true that Sir Edward Carson furiously repudiated the suggestion that he had ever proposed to tamper with its allegiance, but Mr. Bonar Law could go so far as to say that in case of civil war, the soldiers were "citizens like all the rest of us," and other Unionist leaders hinted, in even plainer terms, that if Mr. Asquith, at the bidding of Mr. Redmond, unloosed

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the Crown forces on those commanded by Sir George Richardson, the army would refuse to fight for him. Its support was at least doubtful, considering the Unionist sympathies of practically the whole body of officers, and the deep unexpressed conviction, not only of the rank and file, but of the country at large, that the political game must in no circumstances be allowed to lapse from words into blows.

Nothing, in fact, is more remarkable, throughout this whole controversy, than the evident refusal of the British public to take the prospect of Civil War or the heroics of the politicians seriously. The bye-elections showed no swing of popular feeling one way or the other. Had the Government gone to the country, as its opponents demanded, it is almost certain that the Industrial North would again have decided that business was business, and voted on the Free Trade issue. The language of war had been applied so constantly to the party conflict, and there had been so persistent an over-emphasis of every trivial controversy, that the ordinary man put this Ulster business on a par with Chinese Slavery, the martyrdom of Nonconformist ratepayers, and the persecution by Disestablishment of the Church in Wales—agreeable thrills of the political picture house, that one could forget at the end of each performance.

Only towards the end of the summer of 1913 did it begin to dawn upon the Government that this was no ordinary political squabble. These intractable Irishmen did not understand the rules of the game as it was played in England. What was to be done with men who, when you proposed to alter their political status, started appealing to God? It was evident that, in Walpole's phrase, this dance would no further go. It was high time that somebody should breathe the word "compromise"—a little arrangement that should placate the Protestants with-

out infuriating the Catholics. Philological experts can inform us whether there is an equivalent to "compromise" in the Irish tongue—to the psychologist it would appear improbable.

As, according to the rules of the game, the least failure to insist upon the whole pound of flesh would be hailed by opponents as an admission of defeat and branded by supporters as treason, it was best that the ice should be broken by a Liberal minister who had lately retired from the hurly-burly, the ex-Lord Chancellor Loreburn, who had earned an honourable name for impartiality by his flat refusal to pack the magisterial Bench with caucus nominees. Lord Loreburn's plea, in the House of Lords, for a settlement by consent, was couched in such dignified and earnest terms that it was at once felt, at least in England, that the whole controversy had been placed upon a new and more reasonable footing.

Next began a phase of feverish manœuvring for position, in which confusion was made worse confounded by the conflicting speeches of ministers. First the Home Secretary scoffed at the whole idea of compromise, and announced that the Bill was going through in the teeth of the Covenanters—next the First Lord, Mr. Winston Churchill, went to the other extreme with language which most people took to be an offer to satisfy the Protestant demand for exclusion. Asquith himself, with his lawyer's instinct for not giving away any point a moment before he had to, put out the most impressive feelers for a settlement in one speech, and then, in another, talked of the duty and power of the State to enforce the law of the land—which came back to a rhetorical version of good old George III's "rebels must be made to obey."

Meanwhile Mr. Redmond, who had boasted of his ability to make Mr. Asquith toe the line, was pouring scalding water on the very idea of compromise.

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The Covenanters were "defeated men trying to cover their retreat," "desperate and dispirited men." Mr. Redmond's language was mild, compared with the ordinary Nationalist way of proclaiming that Ireland should never be partitioned, a word destined, in a not remote future, to be on the lips of all those who wished to deny self-determination to minorities. Nor was the language of Sir Edward Carson much more hopeful, since he plainly implied that mere exclusion would not satisfy his followers, and that the mere existence of a Unionist minority in the Catholic districts made it necessary for the Covenanters to oppose any form of Home Rule whatever.

The crucial question was whether at this eleventh hour the Government would take its inspiration from the Liberalism it still professed, and come out with a clear declaration that the Protestant North-East, like the rest of Ireland, should be free to decide its own destinies. It was not till the second reading of the Home Rule Bill, in March, 1914, that Mr. Asquith formulated a definite proposal, to the effect that any Irish county might vote itself out of the Bill for a period of six years and no more. As a move in the party game, this was masterly, for it had the logical effect of taking the wind out of the Unionists' sails. They had demanded one election—the six years' period would give them the certainty of two, and if they won either, this business of Ulster would be on their hands. And the Government could say to the Nationalists that the principle of a United Ireland was still maintained.

Unfortunately neither of the Irish nations had the faintest idea of submitting its essential liberties to two decisions, or fifty, of the British electorate. It was to God that the Covenanters had appealed, and not to Bonar Law, or even John Bull. With such an annihilating swoop as had made him the terror of witnesses, Sir Edward Carson pounced on Mr.

Asquith's six years' limit, and branded it as a sentence of death with stay of execution. At the same time Mr. Redmond announced that the proposals represented the extreme limit of concession. It is highly probable that Mr. Asquith had it in mind to keep the removal of the limit in reserve, as a bargaining counter, to be played at the last moment. But for the nonce the deadlock seemed absolute.

There was, however, one member of the Cabinet who had a plan of his own for resolving it. Mr. Winston Churchill had served his apprenticeship as a cavalry officer, and afterwards as a war-correspondent. He was of the lineage of Marlborough, and was as devout a worshipper as Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc of the sword, a weapon that, unlike these gentlemen, he had actually fleshed, in a charge at Omdurman. He had already as Home Secretary been the moving spirit in a spectacular display of military force during the Railway Strike of 1911, and had even staged a pitched battle against a couple of anarchists in an East End house, with Scots Guards sniping at the windows and Horse Artillery thundering through the streets to their support. He was now in charge of the Admiralty, and his colleague at the War Office was Colonel Seely, D.S.O., a gallant and popular gentleman whose genius was perhaps more suited to a life of open-air adventure than to the subtleties of administration.

Less than a week after Mr. Asquith had formulated his proposals for a settlement, Mr. Churchill delivered a speech at Bradford whose tone of open menace contrasted strangely with the conciliatory note he had sounded so short a time ago. There were worse things than bloodshed. The Covenanters were reviving the issue of Marston Moor. There was no lawful measure from which the Government could or would shrink. And Mr. Churchill concluded a flaming peroration with the unmistakable challenge

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"Let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof." This, if it meant anything at all, was a plain announcement that the Government had at last resolved to cut the knot with the sword.

Within a few days it was apparent that the knot held, but that the sword edge was blunted. Mr. Churchill had ordered the Third Battle Squadron of the Fleet to Lamlash, to be within striking distance of Belfast, and the army had meanwhile been ordered to undertake certain precautionary operations in the way of strengthening depots and safeguarding stores in Ulster, a legitimate enough step if the Protestant forces were to be regarded in the light of potential rioters. But against a people in arms, it had the effect of mobilization, or an attempt to secure a winning advantage in the event of hostilities, and this, as events in a wider sphere were soon to prove, was equivalent to an act of war. It was so interpreted by the general on the spot, who instantly took steps to ascertain which of his officers would consent to serve against the Covenanters. In the Cavalry Brigade, where the question was put, it appeared that from the commander downwards, the bulk of them would prefer to resign.

The effect of Mr. Churchill's actions had indeed been to put matters to the proof, and it had been proved to demonstration that the use of the army against the Covenanters was, as Lord Roberts himself had recently declared, unthinkable. In vain did Mr. Asquith try to save the face of his Government by repudiating a naïve assurance of Colonel Seely to the officers, that there was no question of using the army to crush political opposition to the Home Rule Bill. The only effect of this was to drive the War Minister to resignation and—what was more serious—to deprive the War Office of the services of Sir John French, who was already destined to command

the Expeditionary Force in the only too probable event of war with Germany.

An appalling danger had thus been averted, but at a price calculated to appal any but the most reckless of partisans. For the first time, since its desertion of James II, the army had asserted its unwillingness to fight for constituted authority. As on that occasion, its decision was in complete harmony with popular sentiment, for few Englishmen seriously considered the coercion of the Covenanters worth the bones of a single British Tommy. But where was this process of undermining discipline to stop? How far it had gone was not realized at the time, for it was only after his death that it became known how the Director of Military Operations at Whitehall, an Ulsterman, General Wilson, had recently been working out with Bonar Law, Sir Edward Carson, and other Unionist leaders a scheme for forcing the Government's hand by making the Lords refuse to pass the Army Annual Act, without a definite stipulation that the army should not be employed against Ulster. This, if the Government had refused to surrender, would have had the effect of leaving it, and the nation, without an army at all after April 30—and Wilson was hard at work preparing for the life-and-death struggle with Germany, of whose imminence he was firmly convinced. But then, as he put it, "desperate measures are required to save a desperate situation."¹ It would seem as if the gods, when they are weary of human civilization, afflict it with a madness proportionate to the destruction that they have in mind.

The fury of the politicians on both sides knew no bounds, and to fury on the Liberal side was added consternation. But the cup of humiliation was not yet full, for the Covenanters followed up their success,

¹ *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, Vol. I, pp. 138-9.

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in the ensuing month, with a triumphant act of defiance. A ship was chartered, whose homely name of *Fanny* seems to have been altered, for the occasion, to that of *Mountjoy*, the historic vessel that had broken the boom at Londonderry. She was loaded with 35,000 rifles—not of the wooden sort that had set the whole Liberal press in a roar, but of the best German pattern—and 3,000,000 cartridges. The affair was carried through without a hitch; the munitions were rushed to various appointed destinations along roads guarded by Covenanters; telegraphs and telephones were interrupted; the police and coastguards were powerless to interfere. Mr. Asquith, never at a loss for the impressive phrase, characterized the adventure as a grave and unprecedented outrage, but neither Mr. Asquith nor any other minister dared attempt to deprive the Covenanters of a single one of the smuggled rifles. The Government had now no thought but how to get out of this Ulster imbroglio with as little discredit as possible.

This was not so easy as it seemed. The sowing of dragon's teeth raises a crop that spreads with terrible rapidity. The proceedings of the Covenanters had been watched by their fellow-Irishmen with less of wrath than admiration. It was just what they had always wanted to do themselves, and if one army could be tolerated in Ireland, why not two? With extraordinary rapidity, during these pre-War months of 1914, a Catholic army was formed, whose numbers soon exceeded those of the Covenanters themselves. But it was not, like its rival, marshalled under the Union Jack and demonstrative of its loyalty to the Empire. For now, behind the comparatively moderate Nationalism of Mr. Redmond and his followers, was springing up a new and extreme form whose motto, *Sinn Féin*, or "ourselves alone," perfectly describes the spirit that was driving civiliza-

tion over the abyss. It was spreading like wildfire through the younger generation, and by the law of Irish gravitation it is always the most extreme element that comes to the top.

There was one man who, throughout the whole of this mad crisis, had succeeded in keeping his head. The position of George V was one of terrible difficulty. It would have been only too easy for him to have taken sides, openly, like the Peers, or covertly, like his own Grandmother, with one or other of the contending factions. His great and honourable endeavour was throughout—as it had been in the struggle over the Lords' Veto—to seek peace and ensue it. "Month after month," to quote the *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, "he persisted in his efforts to induce the irreconcilables to moderate their language, and to make generous allowance for each others' differences."¹ Sir Almeric Fitzroy, in his memoirs, tells an illuminating story of how, when one of the ministers happened to remark that he was going to have a tooth drawn, Asquith replied that he was in a similar plight, since he was going to see the King.² Yet never for a moment did the relations of King and Premier cease to be marked by mutual confidence and loyalty.

It was late in July, when the sands were fast running out, that the King, who had resisted every inducement to transgress the limits of constitutional propriety, came forward in his rôle of peacemaker, with a supreme effort to make the leaders of the contending parties come together, and arrange a settlement that should avert a fearful alternative. The Conference, which assembled at Buckingham Palace, was opened with a moving appeal by His Majesty in person. "The time," he pleaded, "is short. You will, I know, employ it to the fullest advantage and be patient, earnest and conciliatory."

¹ Vol. II, p. 28.

² Vol. II, p. 525.

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There were some Government partisans who were not ashamed to take their Sovereign to task, and even to hint at "serious consequences,"¹ but Asquith silenced them with such a snub as he knew on occasion how to deliver.

George V was no miracle worker, to cast out the devils of strife and unreason that had got possession of men's minds in these last days of peace. The issues at the Conference were narrowed down to the finest point of difference. The only real difficulty was what area of Ulster should be marked out for exclusion—the obvious device of a Boundary Commission seeming to have occurred to no one. It was as much as either Mr. Redmond's or Sir Edward Carson's life was worth to incur the guilt of treason to his followers by sacrificing either or both of the disputed counties, Tyrone and Fermanagh. And so the Conference broke down, though amid a fairly confident feeling that the red blood was not destined to flow, if only for the reason that there was now no conceivable means, that the Government dared employ, of coercing the Covenanters. The game was now in the hands of the Lords, who had it in their power to amend the amending Bill embodying Mr. Asquith's original proposals for a settlement, and confront the Government with the choice of accepting the Bill, so amended, or pass Home Rule in its original form and abide by the consequences. There could be little doubt what that choice would be.

But first blood was, after all, about to flow in the Irish Civil War. It was on July 26, the day after the Austrian Ambassador had left Belgrade, that the newly formed Nationalist army endeavoured to repeat, on a smaller scale, the gun-running exploit of the Covenanters. There was no secrecy about this performance, the guns being landed in the full light of noon, the volunteers being doubtless under

¹ *Annual Register*, 1914, p. 160.

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the impression that what had been sauce for the Protestant goose would be sauce for the Catholic gander. But a zealous police official took it on himself to requisition the aid of two companies of Scottish Borderers. After a scuffling affair, in which the police and soldiers were only partially successful in disarming the returning volunteers, the troops marched back to barracks pursued and pelted by a wildly excited Dublin mob. After about a quarter of the men had been more or less seriously injured, some of them appear to have lost patience and loosed off, without orders, into their tormentors, killing 3 and wounding 38. This "massacre," as it was called, aroused such fury throughout the length and breadth of Catholic Ireland, that the situation might easily have got out of the control of the politicians . . . but now, with dreadful swiftness, another situation was developing in which, for a season, even the long feud of Irishman against Englishman, and Irishman against Irishman, could be dwarfed to oblivion.

CHAPTER VII

OVER THE EDGE

With the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Entente, signalized by the meeting of the Tsar and Edward VII at Reval, in 1908, the Armed Peace, that had brooded over Europe since the rape of the French provinces in 1871, entered on its last and deadliest phase. Owing to an almost incredible series of diplomatic blunders, under the auspices of Kaiser William II, the diplomatic edifice that Bismarck had raised with such care and skill lay in ruins. France, the unforgiving, had now emerged from the isolation to which it had been Bismarck's supreme object to relegate her. First the wire had been cut between Berlin and St. Petersburg, and the unnatural union consummated of Republic and Tsardom; next England had been driven into the Entente with France, and so thoroughly irritated and alarmed by the German naval challenge as to become, to all intents and purposes, the ally of France and Russia; finally Italy, still nominally the third partner in the Triple Alliance, had ceased to be an ally in anything but name. The *revanche* was no longer the mad gamble it would have been under Boulanger. If France could only succeed in bringing the might of the Slav, Latin and Anglo-Saxon communities simultaneously to bear upon the Central Powers, it could be undertaken with more than even chances of success. At the same time Germany saw a ring of steel closing round her, and with every succeeding year the odds were being weighted more heavily against her. Was not her best—perhaps her only—

chance to strike with overwhelming violence, at her own, and not her enemy's, selected moment?

All was now ready for the supreme trial of strength. Those about to die had entered the arena, and were walking round each other looking for an opening.

In this time of final tension, the personality of the Kaiser ceases to have the dominating influence it had possessed during the first twenty years of his reign. The glamour of Divine Right had been fatally tarnished by one of those scandals which, like that of the Diamond Necklace, are more fatal to dynasties than the loss of battles and provinces. The Kaiser's most intimate friend, Prince Eulenberg, turned out to have been the leader of such a cult as, in England, had come to be associated with the name of Oscar. It came to be whispered, and more than whispered, that the highest military and aristocratic circles were tainted in a way peculiarly repulsive to the mentality of modern civilized peoples, and though the Kaiser himself was guiltless of anything more disreputable than a fondness for barrack-room stories, he was defiled by the pitch he had touched. Besides, with that ill-fated *Daily Telegraph* interview, the cup of his indiscretions was at last filled. Even docile Germany would have no more of his excursions into amateur diplomacy; a public and most humiliating pledge was exacted from him to be guided henceforth by the advice of his ministers. From now onwards his neurotic self-assertion is only displayed by fits and starts, dangerous from their very infrequency.

Bülow, the master charlatan, did not long occupy Bismarck's seat after the eclipse of his master. But he remained long enough to score for Germany one of those victories on paper that are worse than defeats. In the autumn of 1908, Europe began to suffer from the first of those shocks that were like the prelude to the eruption of some long-dormant

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volcano. Bismarck had prophesied, with that uncanny foresight of his, that the European war was coming—though not in his time—and that it would start in the Balkans. To those who had marked his words, it must have seemed ominous indeed that the old feud of Russia and Austria in the Balkans, that had been more or less patched up by the Treaty of Berlin, should have again been pushed to the forefront of international politics.

This is not the place to detail its course. The start is pure comedy—a Russian Foreign Minister lured into a friendly conspiracy with his Austrian rival at a castle in Bohemia, putting his hand to definite concessions in expectation of returns that were not so definitely guaranteed, finding himself promptly and ignominiously taken at his word with nothing to show for it, and henceforth in mortal terror lest his own written indiscretions should be produced and used against him. The Treaty of Berlin, that solemn compact to whose observance the honour of every one of the European Powers was pledged, was publicly torn to pieces by Austria for the sake of establishing a formal title to a couple of Jugo-Slav Provinces that, as a matter of fact, she had ruled for the last thirty years, and might have gone on ruling indefinitely. At the same time the low comedian of the piece, Ferdinand of Bulgaria, a rather offensive caricature of his Coburg kinsman, Edward VII, seized the opportunity to call himself Tsar instead of Prince, and to repudiate a certain insignificant tribute that was the last remnant of the old sovereignty of Moslem over Christian.

The sanctity of treaties found a strange defender in Serbia—or Servia as she was then called—the fiercest and least reputable of all the little nations that had escaped from the Turkish bondage. The ordinary Englishman scarcely knew of Serbia at all, and what he did know he had not liked. She was

principally concerned in his mind with a horrible incident that had startled the world five years before, in which a King and Queen had been done to death with every aggravation of brutality by a party of officers, who had been so little ashamed of the performance as to have been photographed in a group by way of a souvenir. The country was, in fact, honeycombed with secret societies, or, to put it frankly, murder clubs, for Serbian patriotism knew no limits of morality. Little did the ordinary Englishman dream that the ramifications of international diplomacy could bind him in such a way to the fortunes of Serbia as to cost the lives of a million of his countrymen.

For this was precisely what an Entente with Russia was destined to imply. A murder or two mattered little to St. Petersburg in comparison with the fact that the Serbs worshipped Christ according to the Orthodox rite. Serbia was Russia's protégé, and her ambition to unite all her Jugo-Slav kinsfolk under her sovereignty, as in the far-off days of Stephen Dushan, made her a convenient thorn in the side of Austria, to whom the realization of this dream would mean the disruption of her Empire, and within whose confines the Black Hand of Serbian patriotism was already at work. Rather than suffer the annexation of the two kindred provinces, Serbia would fight—at any rate, if she could get Russia to back her.

But Austria too had her backer. Germany had sacrificed all her other friendships; Russia had gone; England had been driven away; in Italy was no trust for to trust in—only Austria was left, and to the Austrian alliance Germany clung with a drowning man's grip. However wild and reckless might be the statesmanship of Vienna, there could be no question of faltering in what Bülow had called Germany's "Niebelungen troth" to the House of

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Hapsburg. She was in the position of one who has given a book of blank cheques to a poor but spendthrift relation. And the chief of the Austrian General Staff, Conrad von Hoetzendorff, happened to be an intransigent militarist, who was straining at the leash to get at Serbia and end that menace once and for all—if it meant a European conflict, so much the better, according to Conrad's calculations, before Russia had had time to put her house in order.

Conrad was right, to the extent that Russia dared not fight. Even her French ally had no stomach for the contest—as yet. As for England, the Triple Entente was yet in its infancy, and it was doubtful whether, under a Liberal Government, she could be brought into line for a war arising out of a Balkan quarrel in which not one Englishman in ten thousand had the faintest interest. It was just the opportunity for such a superficial talent as that of Bülow to show to the fullest advantage. Germany proceeded to take the trick by presenting what was practically an ultimatum at St. Petersburg. Russia must give way unconditionally or the legions of Conrad would be unleashed against Serbia. Russia, faced with ruin, pocketed her pride and induced the Serbs to draw in their horns.

The Central Powers had scored, and the Kaiser did not fail to rub it in with all the resources of his flamboyant imagination. He saw and proclaimed himself as having appeared in shining armour at the side of his venerable ally. The Triple Entente had been tested and found wanting. But what, on a final balance, had been won or lost? Austria's blank cheque had been cashed in the sham coinage of diplomacy; of solid gains she had nothing. The Serbian menace was in no way diminished—the work of intrigue and conspiracy went forward as actively as ever. Russia was humbled indeed, but

into unforgiving resentment—even her fish-blooded Tsar, as is the way with mild men when they are driven beyond a certain point, had registered a silent determination that this time should be the last. And the members of the Triple Entente, now fully advertised of Germany's intention to drive them apart, began, by a natural reaction, to draw closer together.

Serbia, to which England, as a decent country, had felt herself unable, but a few years previously, to accord the honours of diplomatic intercourse, was now the apex upon which the whole crazy pyramid of European security had come to rest. No matter what provocation she might give, not an Austrian soldier must cross her frontier nor an Austrian gun be fired against her capital. The train had been laid—let but the match be applied and the fire of war would run from one nation to another, licking up the heritage of civilization. The gods must have been in an ironic mood when they allowed mankind to commit its destinies to the black and secret hand of Serbian patriotism.

In 1911 came the second of these premonitory shocks. The business of Morocco had at last come to a head. The settlement, that had been the outcome of so much haggling and intriguing at the Conference of Algeciras, had, in the event, proved to be a complete sham. Nobody, probably, had ever expected it to settle anything, and least of all France. The new police force with its Swiss chief never got going, but the process of rounding off the French Empire went steadily on according to the technique of African grab. The usual incidents occurred—unsympathetic people suggested that they were made to occur—that compelled the civilizing power, with a reluctance as sincere as that of the Walrus for absorbing oysters, to take action. There was the bombardment of a port—of course for

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excellent reasons ; a transitory Sultan deposed by a still more transitory pretender ; fears for the safety of Europeans in the capital, Fez ; a military expedition coming chivalrously to the rescue, and showing every disposition to stay put.

Thus, from Germany's point of view, the result of her threatenings, negotiations, and painfully extorted safeguards, was that France had quietly gone on to possess herself of Morocco, and the Act of Algeciras was so much waste-paper. What was to be done ? The principle of compensation came into play, which means that if a rival grabs anything anywhere, you, if you are strong enough, must be allowed to grab something, from him or from third parties, at least its equivalent. As France could, for the moment, offer nobody else's property, she must be prepared to give up some of her own for peaceful possession of her new conquest. It was Germany's proposition that she should be allowed to take over France's Congo Colony—no very disastrous change for the inhabitants, as France's record of oppression in the Congo was only a degree better than that of Belgium. But then, in the apportionment of Naboth's vineyard, the last thing to be considered is the interest of Naboth.

The Kaiser's experience of Tangier had not cured Germany of her love for dramatic coups. France, as the Power in possession, had every interest in prolonging the haggle till doomsday, if some means could not be found of speeding it up. If the French could play the game of protecting nationals, why not the Germans ? There was an excellent harbour in the south part of Morocco, called Agadir, a deserted stretch of beach and palm trees, but one on which Germany suddenly discovered that she had interests to defend. Into this harbour accordingly, under the glare of a July sun, steamed a lean and rakish craft, diminutive as warships go, with the black cross of

the German Navy flying at her stern, and lay at anchor. The next day, as a few interested Moslems may have noted and the German naval archives record, she had shifted her place of anchorage slightly.

This was the event that came within an ace of setting the civilized world in a blaze. It amounted to a hint, Teutonic in its lack of delicacy, that France was expected to do business, and do it quickly, over this affair of compensation. The haggle accordingly began, one side demanding much more and the other offering much less to start with than any practicable bargaining figure. English public opinion was greatly excited. Germany was now the enemy, and any unusual action that Germany might take was assumed to have some sinister purpose behind it. The possibility of the Kaiser acquiring a naval base in North-West Africa was discovered to be fraught with dire menace to British naval supremacy. It was England's duty to back France in those designs on Morocco of which she had formerly disapproved—though as a matter of fact it seems to have been at one time in the mind of the French Premier, Caillaux, to buy off Germany with a bargain by which his ally would have been left out in the cold.

The negotiations dragged on behind closed doors amid the heat of a sweltering July, until, on the 21st, Europe was startled by another dramatic stroke, this time from England. Mr. Lloyd George, hitherto believed to be an extreme pacifist, took advantage of a dinner of not too friendly financiers to sandwich into his speech a flamboyant challenge to Germany, which, when stripped of its oratorical trappings, amounted to a plain declaration that if there were a war over this Agadir business, England would come in on the side of France. Through the mouth of her Chancellor, England had thus intervened in the Morocco crisis precisely as Germany had done, little more than two years previously, in that of the

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Balkans. She had appeared in shining armour at France's side—had assumed the part of brilliant second.

Looking back on it in the light of innumerable documents, it is difficult to discover any necessity for the launching of this bombshell. There was as yet no reason to believe that Germany intended to put all to the touch for a few thousand square miles, more or less, of desert and primeval forest. The effect of the speech was to make any concession on her part a public humiliation, and to arouse her already rampant Chauvinism to fever pitch. There followed a period of acute tension of which the British public had only the vaguest inkling. The German fleet was in full strength off Norway—significantly well placed for such a sudden coup as the Japanese had brought off, in 1904, at Port Arthur. Though army manœuvres were abandoned, leave was stopped. There was a panic on the Berlin Stock Exchange. . . .

And then, as summer waned to autumn, the tension silently relaxed. The haggle was destined, after all, to end in a deal, and Germany, if she could not get the whole of the Congo Province, must content herself with as fat a slice of it as she could get out of the hardest bargainers in Europe. So France settled down to impose her doubtless beneficent yoke on the descendants of the Barbary corsairs, while Germany proceeded to take a three years' possession of such niggers, gorillas, and rubber trees as fate had assigned her. And the little warship in the bay got up steam, and, doubtless to the relief of her ship's company, was soon a disappearing trail of smoke on the broad Atlantic.¹

The matter did not end here. For observe with

¹ There had, in fact, been three ships altogether, relieving each other at Agadir—but always one, and sometimes two, in the anchorage.

what tragic inevitability the supreme catastrophe was being led on. Just such a humiliation had been inflicted on Germany in 1911 as she herself had inflicted on Russia in 1909. From a material standpoint, indeed, she had done reasonably well for herself, but a glove had been flung at her feet which she had neglected to take up. It was time for her now, by the rules of the game, to assert herself against England in some equally dramatic way, and this took the appropriate form of an additional Naval Law. More Dreadnoughts, more sailors, more money to be wrung from the taxpayer! It was just at this moment that Lord Chancellor Haldane, the minister who had spoken of Germany as his spiritual home, came to Berlin to see if reason could not call a halt to the competition in suicide . . . they handed him the text of the new law, but he, not realizing its importance, put the complex document aside, to be examined at leisure. There was no way out for England, except by repudiating the Entente—and then only a quite insignificant slackening in the construction of that fleet on which the Kaiser and Tirpitz had set their hearts.

What was England to do? With this ever-growing menace from the East—and at the Admiralty, at least, it was remembered what searchings of heart there had been when the High Seas Fleet had been reported, at Agadir time, somewhere off the Norwegian coast—it was necessary to have every available ship concentrated for the decisive action that might well precede a formal declaration of war. Even the Fisher concentration in the North Sea was not enough. England could not afford any considerable force for what had once been her main area of concentration, the Mediterranean. And yet Germany's Austrian ally had, at Germany's instigation, begun to provide herself with a Dreadnought fleet, that must be contained in the Adriatic. Was England

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to burden her already strained finances by providing another fleet in addition to the Grand Fleet? The Liberal little navy men, and Mr. Lloyd George, who was known to be trying to cut down expenditure on the navy, would have something to say to that. There was one plain way out of the difficulty. Let England frankly concentrate her striking force in the North Sea, and let the French fleet, that was amply sufficient for the purpose, do the same in the Mediterranean. This would involve leaving the Channel coast of France with no other guard than that of the British fleet.

So it was arranged, and so it was done. It is amazing that even now ministers could go on talking as if England's hands were equally free to support France or to refrain, if war should break out between her and Germany. If there was such a thing as international honour, it was certain that England's was pledged to the hilt to bar the gates of the North Sea against any hostile action that Germany might undertake. And this could be achieved by no means short of war. France had taken thirty years to forgive England for having stood by to see her crushed in 1870—and yet England had not even had an Entente with her in those days. But now—if England, having encouraged her to uncover her flank, had allowed her to be stabbed, who can doubt that she would have made any terms with the open foe so that she might have joined forces with him in crushing the perfidious friend? The Triple Entente was more firmly cemented, in fact, than the Triple Alliance, one of whose members was already determined to repudiate its obligations.

It says much for the fear that held all nations alike from the final step over the abyss, that for three whole years after the Agadir crisis, the Powers of Europe, armed to the teeth and marshalled for the combat, kept from each others' throats. The history

of these years reads like that of a nightmare. First Italy, without the shadow of pretext or quarrel, fell upon Turkey's last remaining African province of Tripoli, and her army soon distinguished itself by a hideous massacre of the civilian population in one of the coast towns to which it had extended its civilizing attentions. Of course, there could be no question of England taking any action to restrain her—it was all-important that the doubtful member of the Alliance should be coaxed and courted by the Entente. The danger to Italy was from her own ally, Austria, for the ferocious Conrad would have taken a leaf out of her book by falling upon her there and then, while part of her forces were in Africa. There was just enough of sanity, or decency, left at Vienna, to procure Conrad's dismissal from the headship of the General Staff. He was not to remain unemployed for long.

The example set by Italy was next followed by Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, who, secretly encouraged by Russia, suspended their mutual vendettas in order to strip an obviously enfeebled Turkey of her European possessions. This was accomplished with a success that took the world completely by surprise, the Turk being left with no more than an insignificant corner of European territory covering Constantinople. This was highly displeasing to Austria, by whom any aggrandisement of Serbia was felt as a menace. It was with difficulty that she could be restrained from precipitating the general war by launching an attack on her troublesome neighbour, but Germany did, on this occasion, hold her ally back. Austria, however, succeeded in causing another Balkan war, by keeping Serbia from her agreed portion in the share-out of the Turk's effects. This started a dispute which Bulgaria tried to resolve by a treacherous attack on the rest of the gang, whereupon Rumania, that had

hitherto kept aloof, fell upon her from behind in order to appropriate a coveted strip of territory, while the Turk took advantage of the general confusion to resume possession of his recently lost fortress city of Adrianople.

And yet even this wild conflagration in the Balkans was, somehow, prevented from spreading beyond them. For months Russia and Austria stood glaring at each other, ready to spring, but the other Powers showed an unexpected capacity of working together for peace, and Germany made it clear that even her liability for the military ventures of the Dual Monarchy was not unlimited. Nothing, in fact, is more remarkable than the improvement in Anglo-German relations on the very eve of their rupture. It seemed as if there were at last a real goodwill for the settlement of outstanding differences. Friendly co-operation, once tried with success, might easily become a habit. The new German ambassador, Lichnowsky, was a sincere, almost a passionate, friend of England and peace; the Foreign Secretary, Jagow, was a quiet man of conciliatory manners; the Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, a promoted official, was, though an abysmal nonentity, a good man, honestly anxious to seek peace and ensue it. Even the Chief of the General Staff, who ironically enough bore the name of Moltke, was no fire-eater, like Conrad, but a peace-lover, if for no better reason than that, unlike Conrad, he was conscious of his utter inadequacy to the task to which fate and his Kaiser had called him.

But the sledge of civilization, sliding downhill, had now acquired a momentum quite beyond the power of such nerveless hands to arrest. During this last Balkan crisis European War had been staved off by a miracle, but the situation afterwards was even worse than before. The race of armaments was now speeded up to such a killing pace that it would soon be a choice between war and bankruptcy.

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Germany, not content with her new navy law, proceeded to effect a corresponding increase in her already enormous army, with a capital levy to finance it. France answered the challenge by extending her period of compulsory service with the colours from two years to three. Russia was hurrying on—as fast as anything Russian could be hurried—her network of strategic railways in Poland. In England, Mr. Winston Churchill, as the strong man of the Cabinet, had gone to the Admiralty in order to key up the navy to the highest pitch of efficiency, and to make it clear that even a Liberal Government would shrink from no expense in safeguarding England's lordship of the waves. And now the Empire, or part of it, was beginning to help the Mother Country in providing for the common safety. Australia and New Zealand each contributed a battle cruiser, and the Straits Settlements a Dreadnought battleship. The Canadian Premier came forward with a scheme for providing no less than three Dreadnoughts, and a moving scene was witnessed of the whole Canadian Parliament rising and singing the National Anthem. As, however, the Canadian parties could not agree among themselves whether the three ships should be merged in the British Navy, or form the nucleus of a Dominion Navy, the difficulty was got over by the compromise of not providing them at all.

Meanwhile the Serbs, who now, after more than half a millennium, had got even with the Turk for their national humiliation on the field of Kossovo, or Blackbirds, and who were conscious of having Russia to back them, redoubled their intrigues for undermining the loyalty to Francis Joseph of his Jugo-Slav subjects. Conrad was now back at the General Staff, as fiercely determined as ever to destroy this nest of vipers at the first opportunity. The Austrian Foreign Minister was the dapper Count Berchtold, too frivolous, in his Viennese way, to

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count the risks of any gamble, even with armies for counters.

It was just after midsummer 1914 that the eupeptic, unlovable man, of whom we had a passing glimpse at Queen Victoria's funeral, and who was heir to the Austrian throne, went in state to the capital of that same Bosnia, whose recent and unforgiven annexation had goaded Serbia to the verge of war. It was characteristic of him to choose for this visit—the first that any Hapsburg had dared pay to this remote half-Oriental town—the sacred anniversary of Kossovo. Serbian patriotism had one way of dealing with such an insult. Serajevo swarmed with the emissaries of the Black Hand. One of these—a consumptive young man who has since been formally admitted, by a commemorative tablet, to the pantheon of his country's heroes—shot the Archduke dead in his carriage, and following the precedent of Serbian regicide, performed the same office for his morganatic consort, who, poor thing, was enjoying the proudest day of her life in being received, for the first time, with the full honours of royalty.

The train was lit—nothing could stop the fire from setting the world ablaze but a wisdom and restraint that were far to seek in reckless Berchtold and bull-witted Conrad. Perhaps Germany might have exercised a restraining influence—but the Kaiser at this critical moment was stricken by a brain-storm of indignation, that made him blind to any other consideration but that of stamping out a nest of regicides. The counsellors who stood before his face could do no more than let matters drift. And so the Austrians, after nearly a month's delay—for Berchtold had not the wit nor Conrad the capacity to strike in the first hot flush of European indignation—launched the ultimatum that meant World War.

The rules of the skin game were inexorable. It would be unthinkable for Russia, once humiliated,

to stand by and see her protégé crushed. It would be unthinkable for Germany to let Russia mobilize without instantly mobilizing herself; to mobilize against Russia meant attacking France; to attack France meant to march, burning and destroying, through the cities of neutralized Belgium—for Moltke knew no other way of getting his machine to work. All this, with the logic of a mathematical proposition, as the result of a pistol-shot and the spirit of twentieth-century Europe!

And England? For her, no more than the rest, was there any loophole of escape. She had tied herself to a stake from which she could not fly—bearlike she too must fight the course. Well might George V, on the launching of a British ultimatum to Germany, throw up hands of despair and cry to the American ambassador, “My God, Mr. Page, what else could we do?”

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